AS TRUE AS GOLD

MARY · E · MANNIX

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BY

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AS TRUE AS GOLD.

CHAPTER I.

THE ALMIRANTES.

VALERIANO was watering the trees in the *patio*.* He had a large green watering-pot in his hand, from which a tiny stream trickled down into the dusty earth. He went very slowly about his work; Valeriano did everything slowly, and nothing well. But he was a kindly old Indian, who had been in the service of the Almirante family, and the Señora overlooked his incompetency because of his faithfulness. The Señora and her granddaughter were all that remained of many stalwart sons and bright-eyed girls, who had once filled the long, low, gloomy adobe house with joy and laughter. Some of them were dead, and others scattered here

* Courtyard.

and there through the State, which is larger in its length and breadth than many a kingdom. The Señora had passed through a multitude of trials, and she was no longer young. But, after much warring with fate and circumstance, she had accepted the inevitable, and her old age was peaceful. Ramona, her granddaughter, was the child of her youngest son, who had been to her the cause of more joy and more pain than any of her other children. Handsome and brave as one of the old storied hidalgos of whom he was a descendant, with a sweetness of disposition which made him the idol of his parents and companions, his was a weak nature withal. He had been dead several years when our story opens. His daughter had never known him, or any of her near relatives except her grandmother. Valeriano continued pottering about the trees, occasionally giving a little water to the immense pots of mignonette ranged here and there along the edge of the porch, which ran

around the four sides of the *patio,* diffusing a sweet fragrance even through the dark rooms, with their thick walls and broad, low window-seats, in which no one ever sat except at night-time and during the cold and rainy season. This *patio* formed a hollow square, about which the dwelling was built. It was one of the last survivals of old Californian days. On one side were the *sala* and dining-room. Next came the kitchen and servants' quarters. Opposite the *sala* were many bedrooms; facing the kitchen and offices more bedrooms and several lumber rooms. The greater number of these had been unused for years, since the time when the old Señor Almirante had slept his last sleep, and been gathered to his fathers on the bleak hillside graveyard, which could be seen from the windows of the *sala.* The Señora had parted with thousands of acres after this sad occurrence, the culmination of many misfortunes. They had been heavily mortgaged, and *los Americanos* now sowed wheat and corn

where in former years enormous herds of cattle had roamed and multiplied a hundredfold.

The Señora looked up from her drawn-work. She was making an altar cloth.

"Valeriano," she said in Spanish, "what of the newcomers on the hill? Has their furniture all arrived? Are the family here?"

"I know not, Señora," was the reply. "To-day at twelve I saw a carriage—very dusty. It must have come a long distance. It may be that they are here."

The Señora turned to her granddaughter, who was also engaged with drawn-work—a fine handkerchief of sheer lawn.

"Ramona," she said, "Father Gaspara told me yesterday that they are a Catholic family, and that it would please him if we should make them some kindnesses. I said to him that I do not go much, nor you, but he answered me—" She smiled and was silent.

"What did he answer you, grandmamma?" asked Ramona, with gentle, inquiring eyes.

"'Pooh, pooh!' he said, 'that is to be too unsociable, Señora Almirante.'" Again she hesitated, looking thoughtfully into the *patio,* while she drew the needle aimlessly in and out of her embroidery.

"Was that all, grandmamma?" continued the young girl with a winning entreaty in her voice.

"No," drawled the Señora, and there was a little frown between her brows, though her lips were smiling.

"And what else did he say, grandmamma?"

"So it is, I must always tell you everything. He said: 'There are young girls, Señora, and they are very nice Catholic girls. It is but polite that Ramona should know them, for she, too, is young, and it is not right always to be alone with an old woman like yourself.' Now do you think it was very well in Father Gaspara to talk like that?" Although her tone was playful, she looked inquiringly at her granddaughter, watching the effect of her words.

"Ah! grandmamma," replied the girl. "In that he was only joking."

"And you do not care for the young company?"

"Ah, yes," said Ramona, with a quick little breath. "Often I have thought it would be so pleasant to have some friends, as others do, but you know, grandmamma, that I love, above all things, to be with you."

The Señora smiled. She knew that Ramona was truth itself, and she was a woman who, in spite of years and sorrows, had never entirely outgrown her own youth. Her heart was not old; it would never grow old.

"It is but natural," she said. "It is but natural. Sometimes I have thought it would perhaps be best to send you north on a visit to my sister Natalia, your Aunt Estega. She has young people in her household—sons and daughters. It would be pleasant for you there."

"First, grandmamma, let them ask me—those Estegas," said the girl, raising her

small head proudly. "Never have they mentioned me in their letters, or shown in any way that they thought of me. Is it not so, grandmamma? Why should you wish to send me there?"

While Ramona was speaking the Señora's face grew darkly red. Pressing her lips closely together, she leaned back in her low sewing-chair, and began to tap her foot rapidly on the floor of the *corredor.** "It is true," she said, slowly, and her eyes were turned outward to the *patio,* instead of toward the young girl whom she addressed. "It is true that your Aunt Estega has not shown much interest in you, *mi querida,*† but you know she has many children. However, that is not for the present. To-day it is whether we ought not perhaps to send over to the hill and see if the new neighbors can be helped in any way. If they are Catholics, even though *Americanos,* that is everything. And to oblige

* Porch.

† My dear.

Father Gaspara I would turn my house upside down, if need be, though never man has asked less than he."

"Shall Valeriano go?" asked Ramona, laying down her work. "Shall I tell him?" The Indian had finished his watering and disappeared in the kitchen regions.

The girl was eager, and her grandmother saw it. Once more that little frown appeared between her brows. Oh! that she might keep her forever by her side in the quiet coolness of the *patio,* under the tranquil shade of *los pimientos** in the dim and holy stillness of the little oratory, where they said their morning and evening prayers, and on Fridays made the Way of the Cross, before the beautiful miniature Stations brought to the Señora years ago by her loving husband, from Madrid, whence he had once journeyed to visit the home of his ancestors. But the frown vanished again as quickly as it had come, and her face was placidly smiling as she replied:

* The pepper trees.

"No, not Valeriano, *querida;* he is so stupid. Send rather Concilio to ask if we can do anything."

"But Concilio has the toothache, and to-day at dinner she was so cross."

"Poor creature; how she suffers with her teeth!" answered the Señora. "You would be cross also, Ramonacita, if you had the toothache."

"And Adriana has gone to the Mission this afternoon. She will not be home before dark."

"And so that means that you would like to go yourself?" said the Señora, drawing her granddaughter close to her side. There was a wonderful resemblance, yet as wonderful a contrast between them. Of pure Andalusian descent, the Señora Almirante had been in her youth a beautiful blonde, with hair of almost Titian red, and dark brows and lashes shading eyes deeply, darkly blue. Even yet, although white as snow, her tresses were glossy and abundant, and little wavy tendrils

which Ramona was fond of kissing were forever escaping from their thraldom upon her neck and forehead.

Her son, Ramona's father, had greatly resembled her, and the Señora had often told the girl that she was his living image. But while her grandmother's skin had once been dazzlingly white, Ramona's was unusually dark, though very clear, with the faintest shade of pink in her soft cheeks. Her eyes also were those that accompany the brunette complexion; large, soft, and pathetic as those of a timid deer. Black and beautifully penciled were the brows, so like in shape to those of her grandmother. Her magnificent black hair hung in two heavy braids to her waist. It was as straight as an Indian's, and by no desire or persuasion could the Señora ever succeed in making it curl, or even ripple, though she had made many attempts to do so. Though beautiful to others, Ramona's hair had never pleased her grandmother.

They were of the same height—tall and

slender. The Señora had not grown stouter with years, as is almost always the case with Spanish women, and her lithe, straight figure was one of the few vestiges left of the remarkably fine-looking woman she had once been.

"You would like to go, *querida?*" she repeated, laying her hand on the young girl's arm.

"If you wish it, grandmamma," answered Ramona, without enthusiasm. "Indeed, I have a hesitation—they are strange—and we —we do not go at all, and it makes me shy. But I am ready to take a message."

The Señora was mollified. In proportion as her granddaughter seemed indifferent she grew the more willing.

"Yes, it is but right," she answered. "Do not stop to dress at all, but throw over your head my black silk, flowered *rebosa,** and you will be there in five minutes. And say to them, if they are there, that the Señora Almirante sends her compliments, and that her

* Mantle.

house and her servants are at their disposal. And say to them also that the Señora Almirante will do herself the honor to call upon them as soon as it will be convenient for them to receive her."

"And shall I not introduce myself also, grandmamma?" asked Ramona, as she turned away.

"Surely, surely," was the reply. "Otherwise it will be that they take you for—"

"A servant—with this short black gown and the shawl over my head," said the girl with a merry little laugh. "Or, maybe, for an Indian. You know they are *tenderfeet,* these strangers, and I am so dark."

The brow of the Señora clouded. She answered, irritably:

"Why will you always speak thus, Ramona? Let me hear no more of it—so silly and childish it seems. Why always talking of the color of your skin. Is it any darker than that of Carmelita Estrada, or Manuela Baudini, or Victoria Alverado?"

The girl was surprised. Her grandmother had never spoken like this before, even though she had sometimes chided her for alluding to her dark complexion.

"Don't be vexed, grandmamma," she said, touching the withered cheek with her fresh young lips. "I shall never say it again." But as she hurried across the fields, with the silken *rebosa* muffled tightly around her, for the sun was setting, and the evening growing chill, she said to herself:

"It is true that I am no darker than Victoria, or Carmelita, or Manuela, but they are not of the pure Spanish, as we are. Every one knows they are part *Mexicano,* though they will not own to it. And beside grandmamma and my cousins Estega, and from what they tell me of my father, and as I remember grandpapa, I am very dark, very dark indeed. But what matter, so that I am good?"

CHAPTER II.

NEW NEIGHBORS.

THE ranch-house, which was now going to be occupied, had long been vacant, though the orange groves and gardens about it had been well taken care of since the former owner had left it. The death of his wife and two children, all too far gone in consumption for even the balmy climate of California to stay its ravages, had caused its owner to return to the East, and the property had been for sale during a period of three or four years. But again it was about to be tenanted, if the occupants had not, indeed, already arrived.

The shy yet hopeful heart of the Spanish-Californian girl beat almost tumultuously as she approached the house, built on a gently rising elevation, from which the long, low adobe *Casa Almirante* could be seen, nestling amid pepper-trees in the valley below.

A grove of eucalyptus stretched behind it to the fields, a sort of sylvan solitude, the only one she had ever known, in which Ramona had spent many a quiet hour, reclining on the heaped-up carpet of dry leaves, inhaling the pungent, aromatic fragrance of the acorn-like fruit scattered all around her.

When she was a child of ten an American lady had come to reside with them for a time, partly for her health, and partly because it was necessary. Father Gaspara had declared that Ramona should be taught to read and write English, and to learn something of the studies with which other girls occupied their growing years. This had been in the nature of a compromise; the Señora had gently but implacably refused to send the child to school, though there was a convent not far distant, where she would have been thoroughly and carefully trained.

"Father, I can not part with her," she would say to the oft-repeated persuasion of the priest.

"But you do her an injustice. It is not now like formerly. Girls study more and mingle more with the world than in your time," he would retort. "Times are changing; do what you will, think as you will. You are obliged to meet them halfway. And halfway is enough. I despise the new woman. But we must equip the child for the battle with the world which she, like the rest of us, might fight some day—when you and I are gone, Señora."

"Yes, yes, I know," she would reply. "Some day I will think how I shall do." But there the matter would rest, until, feeling it his duty to remonstrate, Father Gaspara would gather his forces for a new attack.

At length a way was found. The American lady, whom Father Gaspara finally persuaded the Señora to take into her household, became to grandmother and granddaughter a companion and friend. In the two years during which she resided with them Ramona learned more than many girls who spend six

or eight at school. True, she was taught nothing of the sciences, but a good foundation was laid, and, as she was very fond of reading and quick to assimilate what she learned, the results were most gratifying to teacher and pupil. Miss Owen had the gift of imparting what she herself knew. The Señora had also a better education than was common to the Spanish women of her time; her father having been a man of no common erudition, he had taught his daughters many things not usual among the early Californians. Ramona had early become proficient in Spanish, which was the language of the household. When Miss Owen returned to the East, she had taken with her the esteem and regret of her friends, and a correspondence had been kept up at intervals ever since. Once or twice a year a packet of well-selected books arrived from New York, and these Ramona would read over and over until the next consignment would make its appearance.

It must be admitted that, in spite of her

own acquirements, the Señora Almirante did not approve of much reading for young girls, and, while she did not forbid it, there were times when Ramona had a more comfortable feeling if she could find herself with a book in the shadows of the eucalyptus grove than under the mildly tolerant, not to say disapproving, eye of her grandmother on the *corredor* facing the *patio*.

But she has already reached the door of the house to which she had been sent on her hospitable errand. There were signs of occupation all about—boxes, half-unpacked, dishes and kitchen utensils lying on the porch in a litter of straw, and a large furniture van drawn up at the front door, in process of unloading. Within she heard the sound of girlish voices, mingled with the deep tones of a man.

Although she knocked several times, there was no response; every one was apparently too busy to pay attention. After two or three ineffectual attempts to make herself heard,

she went around to the side of the house and knocked again, this time on the balustrade of the broad veranda, which was filled with household goods in all stages of unpacking.

Presently a young girl about her own age appeared in the doorway. She had golden hair and dazzling white skin. She wore a dark-blue merino gown; upon her head was a tiny red Glengarry cap. Evidently she had just arrived. "Oh! how do you do?" she said, as Ramona saluted her with a bow and grave, sweet smile.

"I am Ramona Almirante," said the visitor in that sweet, distinct manner with which the Spaniards speak English. There was a faint foreign accent in the words, which fell softly and pleasantly on the ear of Ellen Gordon, who flashed back another radiant smile, which meant, "You are welcome, and how sweet you are."

"Do come in," she said, opening the door to its full width. "That is, if you can find a place to put your feet, in all this confusion."

"I thank you," replied Ramona, "but this evening I will not. My grandmother, the Señora Almirante, has sent me to ask if we can do anything to help you, as it is always a busy time when moving, and often something forgotten."

"Oh, do come in, and I will ask mamma," replied the young girl. "Here is a box that you can sit on," she continued, rapidly sweeping a few bundles to the floor. "I shall not be gone a moment."

Thus pressed, Ramona sat down. The *rebosa* fell back from her head, and across her shoulder, revealing one thick, dusky braid, reaching below her waist, the scarlet ribbon which tied it at the end almost sweeping the floor. Behind her, through the open door of the next room, another girl, a little younger than the first, was making pantomimic gestures to her brother to observe the beauty of the magnificent braid. In a moment the older girl returned, bright and breezy, to say that her mother was very much

obliged, and that she would be thankful for a little gasoline, if they had such a thing, as their own supply had not arrived, and they did not care to make a fire in the large range for the cup of tea which they always had at five o'clock.

"Gasoline!" exclaimed Ramona in horror. "My grandmother would be afraid to have it in the house. It is so dangerous."

"We are not afraid," replied the other lightly. "It doesn't matter, though. There is a great fireplace in the dining-room. We can light a few sticks in that. But you are very kind, all the same. Do you live in that sweet old house in the valley?"

"Yes," was the reply. "My grandmother and I; we live there with Concilio and Adriana, and Valeriano, our servants. That is all. My grandmother will do herself the honor to call soon, and if there is any way in which we can help we shall all be glad."

"Oh, thanks, thanks!" said her new acquaintance. "And now I am going to tell

you *our* name. It is Gordon. I am Ellen, and there are five others—Mattie and Charlie and Jack and Elise, and Ben, who is my cousin. I am fifteen. How old are you?"

"Fifteen and a half," said Ramona. "On Corpus Christi I shall be sixteen."

"How tall you are!" exclaimed Ellen. "You look eighteen—you are so straight and dignified."

Ramona smiled. "Yes," she said, slowly. "They tell me that I am old for my age."

"In some ways, perhaps," replied her companion. "But in others not, I am sure. Here comes mamma!"

Her mother was a short, stout, pleasant-looking lady, who came forward smiling, and took Ramona's hand in both of hers. "I thank you very much, my dear," she said, "and please thank your kind grandmother for her neighborly offer of assistance. Just now we are in a mess, of course, but after a few days, when we shall be settled, everything will go nicely. I hope we are going to be

very good friends and neighbors. Father Gaspara has told me of your family."

Ramona's face grew very bright and happy.

"Yes, I hope so—I think so," she said. "Grandmamma hardly ever visits, but she will come after a while, and always we are glad to help when we may."

"Be sure that we shall need a great deal of advice and instruction about our orange and lemon groves," said Mrs. Gordon. "My two sons and my nephew propose to do all the work themselves, but as yet they are very ignorant of what they have before them. For the present Father Gaspara has recommended a man, Vincente Curo, who will help us. You know him, perhaps?"

"Oh, very well," replied Ramona, drawing her mantle about her in readiness for departure. "He is such a good man—so faithful."

Mrs. Gordon again took her hand. "And your name is—" she asked.

"Ramona Almirante," said the young girl. "It is strange to your ears, I think."

"Strange? No," was the reply. "You know the lovely story of 'Ramona,' of course. It is quite familiar with us in the East—that name—for every one has read the beautiful tale."

"No, I have never heard of it," answered Ramona. "Is it about California?"

"Oh, yes, and I think the scene is laid not far from here. Do you read English?"

"Yes, Señora," said the girl. "I read it very well, and I love to read it. Sometimes when I am alone I read aloud, so as not to forget how to pronounce, for with my grandmother I speak nothing but Spanish."

"You have been to school—to the convent, perhaps?"

"No, Señora, I have never been to school. Spanish, to read and write, my grandmother taught me, and from a lady who lived with us about two years I learned to read and write English. Perhaps you know her. It is Miss Owen; she lives in New York."

"No; we come from Philadelphia," said

Mrs. Gordon. "Now, as soon as ever we have unpacked our books you shall have 'Ramona' to read. I fancy she must have looked like you."

"It is true, then?" inquired Ramona.

"Partly so, I believe."

"I shall thank you very much for the book," answered Ramona. "And now I must go. I hope you will enjoy your new home, and soon have everything arranged. *Adios, mis amigas,** if I may so call you."

"Indeed, yes—indeed, yes," said Ellen. "*Adios.* It is the only Spanish word I know." The dark eyes flashed brightly out from under the heavily embroidered *rebosa,* the beautifully curved lips parted in a swift, bright smile. Then she was gone, but if there is any truth in the old axiom her ears must have burned for long after, so numerous and so full of admiration were the encomiums of the Gordons on their first altogether charming visitor.

* **Adieu, my friends.**

CHAPTER III.

A FRIENDLY CALL.

THE Gordons were very pleasant and cultured people, who had come to California for the health of the two younger children, as well as for other reasons connected with the loss of a large sum of money, which had been unwisely invested by the late Mr. Gordon. To retrench expenses became necessary, and the widow thought a few years' residence in this delightful climate would be desirable for many reasons. There were three daughters, one older and one younger than Ellen, and also three boys, two of whom were grown, one of them a nephew. Mrs. Gordon had spent a winter in California some years before; therefore she had some slight experience in their new conditions, so entirely different from those to which she had always been accus-

tomed. The Señora Almirante soon paid them a visit, accompanied by her granddaughter. The family were charmed with her, and Ramona seemed even more attractive than at their first meeting. On taking leave the Señora took both Mrs. Gordon's plump white hands in her own, and, clasping them kindly, she said:

"You will pardon me, Madame, if I say that these hands were never made to work, and unless my eyes deceive me they have not worked. Do not try to do that which you are not able or accustomed to do. You have said that you do not intend to keep any woman servant. I beg that you will change that intention. Allow me to find for you a faithful Indian who will serve you well, for a very little of money."

"I believe you are right, Señora," was the reply. "Already I begin to feel fatigue, because I have done more than my strength will permit. But the Indians—there is no danger?"

The Señora laughed. "They have been civilized for three generations," she said. "And while their nature is still not like ours, they are to be trusted, and they are very easy to be—what do you say in English? Ah! managed—that is the world."

"Very well," said Mrs. Gordon. "I thank you very, very much, and shall be glad to employ any one whom you may send."

"That is right—that is right," replied the Señora, patting the younger woman's hand in a motherly way. "Come soon to *Casa Almirante.* There you and your family will always be welcome."

"Very soon," was the reply. "And I trust that you also will come often to see us."

The Señora shook her head sadly. "Do not expect it, Madame," she replied. "For years I have not gone abroad, save to Mass, and once a year, perhaps, to visit an old friend at the other side of the valley, who can not leave her bed. But come, and send your children, and I shall be glad to have

Ramona with them. It is true, as Father Gaspara has often said, that she needs other society than an old woman like me."

"Yes, no doubt it is true and wise of Father Gaspara to say so," was the reply, "though I doubt very much, Señora, if she has ever felt the need of it. Still, youth needs youth. We all grow old soon enough. And your granddaughter, Señora—she is the most charming young girl I have ever seen. We are all in love with her."

"Yes, she is very sweet and good," the the Señora answered. "Without her my life would be empty indeed. She is all that I have left of many sons and daughters."

"They are all dead but her?"

"No, not all dead, but far away," said the Señora. "Ramona is the child of my youngest child, and in feature and figure she is like unto him. He was my dearest, perhaps, and now she takes his place."

"Her mother, too, is dead?" inquired the other, in a sympathetic tone.

The Señora hesitated. She seemed embarrassed. Mrs. Gordon regretted having asked a question which she felt had been ill-timed.

"I have been mother and grandmother both," the Señora replied, but her eyes did not meet those of her questioner.

"Thus she is doubly dear," said Mrs. Gordon, pressing the old lady's hand. Sympathy is always sweet, and seldom unwelcome, even to the most self-contained and self-sustaining heart. The Señora's eyes filled with tears.

"Ah! yes," she said. "The child is very dear to me. There are moments when I have accused myself of having been selfish with regard to her; yet to me it has always seemed that my reasons were good. Again, Madame, let me say that I am pleased you have come to live near us."

Ramona had been with the girls, Ellen and Mattie, on the piazza. At her grandmother's bidding she came forward, followed by the two sisters.

"You are as I was once, Señorita," said

the old lady, regarding Ellen with admiration in her eyes, "only your hair is lighter than mine was."

"I am sure I shall never be as handsome as you were and are," said Ellen, with a manner so *naïve* that the Señora could not but smile.

"Of that there is no one who can now judge," she replied, so gaily that her granddaughter was surprised. "To-day you have youth, which I have lost long ago. Come, *querida,*" she continued. "It is time now to go. But I hope often, often to see all of you at *Casa Almirante.*"

The girls soon became very intimate. At first, although assured by Father Gaspara, who came once a week to say Mass in the old church near the ruined plaza, that they were unexceptionable in every way, her dislike of everything American had made the Señora cautious, but when the beautiful little oratory which they had arranged in an unused room had been described to her by Ramona she cast all doubts aside.

"First," said the girl, as she sat on the step of the porch at her grandmother's feet, "First they have papered the wall in white with gold around the border and gold stars in the ceiling. And they have a little white altar which Vincente made and painted for them, and on it is a pretty linen cloth, with lace sewed on. And that is the only thing which is not of the most lovely—that lace, dear grandmamma. It is what you buy in the store."

"Which even an old woman may understand to mean that you will like to make them a present of one of my handsome drawn-work cloths, or perhaps one also with the fine knitted lace."

"Yes, grandmamma, I thought of it as I looked at the other," said Ramona. "It would be so kind, and they would like it; they are so nice."

"And it would not offend them?"

"I am sure not, grandmamma."

"Well, we shall see. This afternoon I will

look over my stores. But, first, there would be to wash and bleach for three or four days—they are so yellow."

"Concilio will like to do it," said Ramona. "I will tell her she may see the little chapel. Mrs. Gordon will be glad to show it to her."

"Have they pictures and a statue?" asked the Señora.

"The Stations all around, even finer than ours. And a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe; they bought it in Mexico. It is of marble, perhaps as high as my knee, and so beautiful. And vases of marble, grandmamma—and the floor covered with pure white matting, and a strip of beautiful red carpet from the door to the altar."

"And do they pray there, *querida?*"

"Morning and night always, the same as we do," said the girl. "And to-morrow Father Gaspara is coming to bless it, and all the house, and Mrs. Gordon will be here this evening to ask you to go to tea."

"You know I never leave home," replied

the Señora. "It pleases me much that such a pious and polite family have come to live near us, but to begin to go to functions, and to give them, as it would be expected if I went, I can not. Do not ask me to do it, my child."

"But, grandmamma—this is not a 'function.' How funny it sounds to hear you say that English word!"

"Yes, it is not a prettily sounding word," answered the Señora with a queer little smile, "but Miss Owen said it was how to describe their teas and receptions."

"But, grandmamma—this is only to take tea with the Gordons. I shall not be happy if you are not there."

"Well, this once, perhaps, if they insist that I must go, but not to make a practice of it. And when will the young ladies begin to learn Spanish? I am ready to teach them at any time."

"Next week, I think, grandmamma," said Ramona. "Ellen already knows a good deal,

though she said the first evening she could only say *Adios.* They had been studying for months; they thought out here in California we were all Spanish-speaking people."

"Once it was so," answered the Señora, "but very soon all the old ones will have passed away, and the young ones are only too ready to put on the clothes and assume the habits and speak the language of the stranger."

Ramona made haste to change the conversation. She knew by experience that recalling the past had a tendency to make her grandmother melancholy. "Martina is doing beautifully," she said. "She is so kind, and they have such fun, that she can not speak any English. They have to make signs to her to make her understand, and then they laugh, and she laughs, too. Every day they ask her to make some Spanish dish that they have not tasted. And the hotter it is with peppers, the better they like it. They are very nice, indeed, grandmamma."

"Yes, Concilio tells me that Martina is well pleased, and Vincente also. He says that he has never worked for such people. They do not know our ways, nor our methods of farming, and they want to learn; not like others who come from a climate and a country entirely different, thousands of miles away; and yet they wish to bring here the ways and customs of those distant places, which do not go with our ways at all. Oh, of such persons I have seen enough in my time to wish that I might never go forth into the world again to meet their like."

"But we do not see many of them now," said Ramona, again seeking to divert her grandmother's thoughts from the unpleasant channel to which they were turning. "We are so hidden in our little nest here in the valley that they scarcely ever see us."

"I was not speaking of myself alone," said the Señora. "It is fortunate that I have been spared those insults. But I like not the way the Americans treat our people."

This was a tender subject.

"But Father Gaspara says always that there are good and bad among every nation. And the Gordons are good, grandmamma—you know they are good?"

"Yes, yes, child; I know they are."

"And if Mrs. Gordon comes to-night, you will promise to go to-morrow evening?"

"Well—perhaps," was the reply. "For once, at least, I may go."

Ramona saw that the battle was won. Mrs. Gordon came, according to agreement, and so increased the favorable impression she had already made that the Señora produced her stack of brocades, laces, and handsome Spanish embroideries, for which the younger lady could not find words sufficiently strong to express her admiration. She went home with her arms laden. The Señora had stores of beautiful things, and she had also a generous heart.

There was no difficulty in persuading her to be present at the blessing of the house and

oratory, at which she appeared the next afternoon, clad in costly if somewhat antiquated raiment. Mrs. Gordon said afterwards "looking as if she had stepped out of an old Spanish picture."

Father Gaspara, too, was in wonderfully pleasant mood, full of anecdote and reminiscence, which was shared by the Señora. It was discovered by the girls that Ramona had attained wonderful proficiency on the guitar, and was also the possessor of a beautiful voice. She played for them danzas and fandangos innumerable, and they sang together all the songs they knew.

The young moon was high in the heavens when, under the escort of the oldest of the Gordon brothers, they rose to take their leave.

Father Gaspara had taken his departure much earlier. It seemed to Ramona the happiest evening she had ever known.

CHAPTER IV.

"RAMONA."

SEVERAL families in the neighborhood besides the Almirantes had called on the Gordons. Among them were a few Spanish and Mexicans, but, though they were friendly and hospitable, their manners lacked the fine patrician flavor that recommended itself to the newcomers. The few Americans living in the vicinity were very poor and hard-working ranchers. too much occupied with earning their scant portion of bread to waste any time on the newcomers, who were thus left either to their own resources or the friendship of the old Californians.

One evening the wife of the keeper of the hotel in the village sent an invitation for a party, to be given the following night. After some inquiries, Mrs. Gordon found that it

would be a respectable gathering, and, as she wished to establish friendly relations with her neighbors, concluded she would attend for a short time, with her two sons and nephew as well as her eldest daughter.

Ellen begged to be allowed to accompany them, but her mother hesitated.

"You are too young, Ellen," she said, "and we shall not stay long."

"Of course I won't expect to dance, mamma," said the child, for she was no more. "I just want to see how they do, and to hear the Mexican music. They say it is so pretty."

Her mother remaining firm, Ellen bethought her of another plea.

"If the Señora and Ramona should be going, may I not go along, then?" she asked.

"I feel moderately certain the Señora will not be there," said her mother. "And without her assuredly not Ramona."

"Well then, mamma, will you let me go if the Señora will allow Ramona to come with us? She could stay all night here."

Mrs. Gordon hesitated. She seldom refused to gratify her children's wishes. At length she said:

"Very well. You may run down to the Señora's and inquire what they are going to do. If she will permit Ramona to come under my protection, I shall be glad to take care of you both."

Away flew Ellen to *Casa Almirante.* She found Ramona and her grandmother making guava jelly in the kitchen. They welcomed her warmly. An array of neatly covered glasses containing the ruby-colored jelly stood on one of the broad window-seats.

"Those are for your mother," said Ramona. "Concilio will take them up this evening."

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Ellen. "But that is such a lot."

"We have dozens and dozens of guava bushes," replied Ramona. "Grandmamma always makes a large quantity for the Sisters and also for Father Gaspara. He is so fond

of guava jelly. Would you like to have some? Did you ever taste it?"

Ellen never had. A portion of the transparent, quivering mass was turned from a glass into a pretty little china saucer, and she pronounced it excellent. After she had disposed of the last spoonful she said:

"But I came to ask you something, Señora. Are you going to the *baile** to-morrow night?"

"What!" exclaimed the old lady in horror. "I go to a *baile?* And where?"

"At the hotel," answered Ellen, a little discomfited.

"At Sepulveda's? To a public *baile?* Indeed no, dear child. How did you think to ask such a thing?"

"I do not believe it is to be a public ball," replied Ellen. "They sent us an invitation. If it were to be public do you think they would have done that, Señora?"

"I can not say. To be sure, there are

* Ball.

balls, and balls, Ellenita. Whatever is going on takes places there. But, again, it may be that they have once in a while a private party for their own amusement. Why not?" continued the old lady. "I find no harm in that; but to invite your mamma—I consider it a great—what do you say—impudence?"

Ramona hastened to explain.

"But, grandmamma," she said, "very nice people, especially Americans, go to those balls sometimes."

"I do not believe it," answered her grandmother. "I do not say they are *bad* people who go there—no, not at all—but for Mrs. Gordon and her sons and daughters it is not the proper society. And I do think they have taken a great liberty."

"They meant to be kind," said Ellen. "You know the Sepulvedas have called on us; and we thought in this country every one was sociable with their neighbors."

"Not at all, not at all," said the Señora, proudly, as she threw back her head in a

manner which revealed her to the young girl in a new light. "For instance, they would not dream of inviting me or my granddaughter to one of their *bailes*. Those Sepulvedas, indeed! Never!"

"I think mamma will go for a little while, and my sister and two of my brothers. We can not offend our neighbors when they have been kind," said Ellen, somewhat timidly. She no longer thought of asking whether Ramona might not be allowed to accompany them to the party.

"Very well; that is as your mamma pleases," said the Señora very gently. "As you say, one must not offend one's neighbors; but I shall be much mistaken if she will attend more than one party at the Sepulvedas. If one goes to a place, one must go to another. It will not be to the taste of Mrs. Gordon—those *bailes*."

While her grandmother was speaking Ramona looked from her to Ellen with some anxiety, fearful that such plain-spoken opin-

ions might not be understood by her friend. But Ellen was a sensible girl, and after she had returned home and reported the conversation to her mother both agreed that the Señora doubtless had points in her favor. But they were differently situated, and Mrs. Gordon still kept to her resolve of attending the party. However, Ellen was obliged to remain at home, as had at first been decided.

The Sepulvedas proved most hospitable. The seat of honor, a red velvet armchair, placed in the midst of a row of common wooden ones, was given to the American visitor, who was not left alone during any portion of the evening. After the dancing had begun, in which the young Gordons joined, the lady of the house came to sit beside her guest.

"Your daughter Ellen—I am sorry not to see her—she would have enjoyed it," said the hostess.

"Yes," was the reply. "But I thought her rather young to attend a party."

"I see her much walking and on horse-

back with Ramona Almirante," said the Señora Sepulveda. "They are great friends. No?"

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Gordon. "The Almirantes have been very kind. They are charming people."

"When they will—yes," was the sharp response. "We are surprised that they honor you with their friendship, for the Señora hates *los Americanos.*"

"Your people have had some reason to dislike ours in the past," replied Mrs. Gordon, "but all that will be forgotten soon. And we are Catholics, you know; and doubtless that has influenced the Señora in our favor."

"So are we," responded the hostess with emphasis. "And we are Spanish—that is, some of us—of as pure blood as the Señora Almirante. My mother was of the Ortegas, as good as she, yet she sticks her nose up in the air at all of us. Never does she set foot in one of our houses—never. Nor ever does

she permit Ramona to come where our girls are—except on Sundays to the Catechism Class, and during the time of preparation for Confirmation and First Communion. Ha! that makes me laugh—that." She began to fan herself vigorously.

Mrs. Gordon did not know what to say. She had no quarrel with Señora Almirante; neither did she wish to have one with the lady whose hospitality she was now enjoying. After waiting a reasonable time for a remark, and seeing none forthcoming, the hostess continued:

"It would be rather that we would keep our girls away from Ramona. Not that she is not well enough and sweet in her ways, and it is not her fault that—" Here she broke off abruptly. She could not help feeling that her guest was not interested in what she had been saying, and, moreover, she was not without judgment. "But it does not matter," she resumed. "It does not matter. And why should I be the first to tell you

what every one who lives long hereabouts comes to know at last. But it is enough to look at Ramona—"

"It is," adroitly interjected Mrs. Gordon, seeing her opportunity, and not having the least curiosity to hear the remainder of the sentence. "She is certainly an unusually attractive-looking girl."

"She *is* pretty," meekly rejoined the Señora Sepulveda, and seeing she had gone as far as was consistent with discretion turned the conversation to the *danza,* which was quite new to her guest.

On the following day, in the afternoon, Ramona, who had been over at the Gordons, was sitting with her grandmother on the piazza. The Señora, as usual, had some embroidery in her hand; her granddaughter was reading a book, or rather absorbed in it.

"What is that you are reading, *querida?*" she inquired at last, after two or three ineffectual coughs to attract the girl's attention.

"It is 'Ramona,'" was the reply. "Don't

you remember, they asked me at the Gordons if I was named for it? I told you. And now Ellen has lent it to me. And it is so beautiful, but oh! so sad, so very sad."

"It was that, perhaps, which caused the light to be burning in your room after nine last night," said the grandmother, with a note of reproach in her voice. The Señora did not much approve of reading for girls.

"Yes, grandmamma," answered the girl. "I sat up until ten reading it."

"What is it about?"

"It is partly a true story, Ellen says. A young girl, called Ramona, lived with her aunt. Her cousin wanted to marry her, but his mother did not like."

"Very proper," said the Señora curtly. "It is not for cousins to marry. Are you sure it is a good book, *querida?*"

"Oh, yes, grandmamma. Father Gaspara said so to Ellen."

"Then it must come right at the end, and be very good, if he said so."

"I don't know; I have not read it all. But that was not why the mother did not want her son to marry Ramona. Her mother was an Indian—and there was an Indian boy, and she liked him better, and she went away and married him. But oh, they had it so hard, grandmamma—so very hard—and I am afraid it will be sad at the end."

While Ramona was speaking her grandmother had dropped her embroidery, and leaned back in her chair, that ominous frown which Ramona well knew gathering between her brows. Suddenly she rose from her chair, and extended her hand.

"Give me that book!" she cried, with blazing eyes. The girl obeyed her. Throwing it violently on the porch beside her, she continued: "What trash to read—what trash! You shall see no more of it. Who has written it?"

"A lady who came long ago from the East, a writer of stories. It can not be bad, grandmamma, because Father Gaspara is in

the story himself, and he has written his name on the first page."

"Right!" exclaimed the Señora, "right to put such things in books that all may read, when in the hearts of those whom they have made to suffer they are buried and put away, deep, deep out of sight, that none may see or know. Oh! it is cruel, cruel thus to make stories out of the pain of bleeding hearts. And you tell me that Father Gaspara has written his name in such a book. Now, indeed, it is time for me to die!"

"Grandmamma," implored Ramona, almost weeping. "Indeed, you do not understand. It is only a story; they write stories about every kind of thing. Why, why, *querida,* do you feel so bad?"

She threw her arms about the old lady, and, mingling their tears, they rocked each other to and fro. But the storm was soon spent; suddenly the Señora released herself from her granddaughter's embrace, and glanced at the offending book, which lay

where she had thrown it on the floor of the piazza.

"Do not read any more of it, *querida,*" she said, very gently. "I may be foolish, but take it back to the Gordons. Do not read any more of it."

CHAPTER V.

CORPUS CHRISTI AT THE MISSION.

THE next morning the Señora seemed to have forgotten her excitement of the evening before. She was more than ordinarily gentle with Ramona, even going so far as to tell her that she might finish the book if she desired to do so.

"Not if it does not please you, grandmamma," said the girl; "though if you would read it a little yourself you would understand that it is not what you think."

"You can not know what I think, child," rejoined her grandmother sadly. "It can not be explained to you why it opened a wound in my heart to hear what you told of it. And then, when I had gone to bed, I asked God to forgive me that I had been so harsh with you, *mi corazon.*"*

* My heart.

And Ramona thought that perhaps one of her uncles, perhaps even her father, might have once desired to marry a cousin. Having obtained permission, she could not resist the desire of finishing the story, which ended, as most of our readers doubtless are already aware, very sadly for the poor heroine and her Indian husband.

A few days after this, Ellen Gordon came over one morning to ask if Ramona might accompany them to the Mission for the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi.

"Well," said the grandmother, "I will think about it. It is Ramona's feast day, as perhaps you know. She is Ramona *del Santissimo Sacramento.*"

"What a pretty name," said Ellen.

"Yes," replied the Señora, "it is a pretty name. Always on Corpus Christi, in the evening, we have a little feast—Ramona and myself. Something, perhaps, extra for dinner, and after a little gift from me, and then maybe some playing on the guitar.

This time I thought to ask you all 'for the evening.'"

"Thank you very much," said Ellen. "I am sure mamma will be glad to come. And you will let Ramona come with us to the Mission, Señora?"

"I think she may go," was the reply. "But after to-morrow I will let you know for certain."

There was really no reason why Ramona should not accompany her friends, but the Señora had been so accustomed to having her always beside her that she could not readily accept a new order of things, such as the neighborhood and friendship of the Gordons was beginning to establish. But as there was no possible excuse to be made for not allowing her to go, she finally gave her permission, to the great joy of her granddaughter and that of her friends. The Señora herself could not be induced to make one of the party, though Mrs. Gordon tried to prevail upon her to do so.

"No; I am a stay-at-home," she said. "I have always been, and more so these late years. You will all pray for me, I hope, at the different altars, and I shall be praying for you at home."

Ramona never forgot that day at the Mission. Although she had lived in sight of it nearly all her life, though it was a shrine of devotion for the residents in the neighborhood, and the great objective point of all tourists, Ramona had never visited the hallowed spot, now a ruin, made sacred by the memories clustered about its history, and the blood of the martyred priest, who fell a victim to his zeal and charity, murdered by those whom he had helped to rescue from barbarism in the glorious days of Father Junipero Serra. Ramona knew all the thrilling story, and had often longed to behold the scene of such heroic self-sacrifice, but it would never have occurred to her to take the initiative in asking her grandmother to allow her to go anywhere. And now to-day she was

going to the Mission, at last, to participate in the celebration of Corpus Christi, of which Concilio had often given her such glowing accounts, and to see the Indian School where some one hundred and fifty children from the San Pablo reservation were receiving their education.

It was a lovely morning, and a gay carriage load that set forth from *Casa Almirante,* where the Gordons had stopped for Ramona. Rapidly and merrily they drove through the green valley, behind a pair of stout, strong mules, finding themselves in the course of an hour one of a long procession of vehicles bound for the same destination. But they soon outdistanced them all, drove through the dry bed of the river which Ramona had seen flooding the entire valley the winter before, and after laboring more slowly through the heavy, sandy road, which wound from the river bank between fragrant orange groves and beneath overtopping boughs of acacia, presently came in sight of the oldest

and once the finest olive orchard in the State, that of the Mission Fathers who first planted the sign of redemption in California. To the left were the two buildings which constituted the Indian School—one for the boys, the other for the girls. They were at a considerable distance apart, and between them, a crumbling and picturesque ruin, daily falling more and more to decay, was all that remained of the once famous and historic mission, of which, unless steps are taken to preserve it, in a few short years not even a vestige shall be left. They were the first to arrive, and had leisure to go about and admire the prettily arranged altars for the Blessed Sacrament, five in all, one at the base of the hill, another midway between it and the beautiful little shrine at the top, where Our Lady sits, with the dead Christ on her knees, waiting to receive the prayers of faithful souls through the summer sunshine and the wintry rain. Then down the hill again, on the opposite side, two stations more

are constructed of the graceful, feathery pepper-boughs, and adorned by the dexterous and willing hands of the Indian boys and girls. After they had examined and admired everything, they directed their steps to the chapel, where Mass was about to begin. When it was over they followed the long procession to the end, making it, as did nearly all the spectators, a real pilgrimage of prayer. Ramona and the Gordons were very much edified by the modest and decorous behavior of the children, who seemed to range in age from two or three to eighteen, and in color from almost black to the white of the Caucasian.

The party took lunch under the olive trees in the grove, and while they were thus engaged Mrs. Gordon proposed that they visit the Indian School before returning home. The Sisters received them very kindly. Ramona introduced herself as the granddaughter of the Señora Almirante, but the Mother, who was new to the place, attached no special

significance to the name. After the girls had performed their calisthenic drill, sang some pretty hymns and popular songs, and recited a few pieces, the Mother suggested that they visit the boys' department. Chairs were brought, and the visitors invited to seat themselves in front of the teacher's platform. The boys went through their evolutions, after which the Mother requested them to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

"They like it very much," she said, "and there is one little fellow here who has a beautiful voice. I will ask him to sing the solos. There he is on the front row."

"Alejandro," she continued, "you will begin." She struck a few chords on the little organ, and a slight, handsome boy at once stood up. Without the least embarrassment he began to sing, as one who was born singing. The visitors had never heard anything more charming. When it was over, Ellen whispered to Ramona: "That little fellow looks and sings like an angel."

"Like Ramona, you should say," rejoined her sister. "He is her very image."

"So I thought myself," said Ramona with a little blush. "But when you said he was like an angel I did not like to speak."

They all laughed, Mother Ambrosine included. "He does look like you," she said. "He is a very nice child."

"But not an Indian?" asked Ramona. "He is so white; the whitest here, I think."

"Oh, yes, he is an Indian," replied Mother Ambrosine. "His mother is quite dark; she brought him when he came this year. Of course, he may be partly white; many of these children are."

"What is his name?" asked Ramona, who felt strangely drawn to the boy. He, in turn, glanced shyly toward her from time to time when he thought himself unobserved.

"Why, it is the same as yours!" exclaimed the Mother, suddenly remembering the name by which the young girl had introduced herself. "It is Almirante."

"How strange!" exclaimed Ramona. "Will you call him here, Mother, please?"

"Come here, Alejandro," said Mother Ambrosine.

The boy came forward at once. Ramona extended her hand. "They say you look like me," she said, with a charming smile, "and I believe you do."

The face of the boy grew crimson as he lifted his eyes to hers. They might almost be called adoring eyes. Ramona started. She had seen that rapt expression in those of her grandmother when, on rare occasions, her usual mood of kindness toward her had waxed into one of passionate affection. And yet the Señora's eyes were blue, while those of the boy were of a soft, dark brown, like her own.

"How old are you?" she asked, filled, somehow, with an unaccountable shyness, and not knowing what else to say.

"I am nearly eleven," said the boy. "This morning I made my first Holy Communion."

"That is beautiful," said Ramona, "to have such a lovely feast for it. It is my feast also, and my birthday."

"Yes. That is nice," said the little fellow, with a smile the counterpart of her own.

"And how long have you been at the Mission?" she continued.

"Five years," he replied. "But in the vacations I go home."

"He has a good mother," said Mother Ambrosine. "Alejandro loves her, and is glad to go home to her."

"Surely," said the boy, gravely.

"Have you a father also?" inquired Mrs. Gordon.

"No, Señora, my father is dead. He died when I was a little baby. But I have a grandfather who is old."

"His grandfather is called Sebastiano Pago," said Mother Ambrosine. "He is the head man of the Indians who live on the San Vincente reservation. He is a very fine man."

"Pago?" said Ramona, looking at her inquiringly. "I thought you said—"

"It is his mother's father," she replied.

"And your name is—"

"Alejandro Almirante," said the boy, his face again crimson. Yet there was a proud poise of the head, as though he might have added: "I am not ashamed to tell you my name."

"And *I*—am Ramona Almirante," said the girl, with a merry little laugh. "Are you not surprised to hear it?"

"No, Señorita," responded Alejandro. "My cousin Refugio told me it was your name."

"Who is your cousin?"

"He is the cousin of Concilio. She lives at your home, Señorita, and he has been there."

"I do not remember," said Ramona. "And which is Refugio? I would like to see him, so that I may tell Concilio."

Alejandro looked first at Mother Ambro-

sine, and then behind him. She motioned a boy to come forward. He was larger than his cousin, but a good-looking fellow. After Ramona had exchanged a few words with him—he was not nearly so bright as Alejandro—the Mother said: "You may go back to your seats, Refugio and Tito—that is his pet name," she continued. "He was so little when he came."

"Good-by," said Ramona, pressing the small, delicately shaped hand in hers. "Be a good boy, and study well, and perhaps some time I will come to see you again. Good-by, Tito."

"Good-by, Señorita," said the boy, lingeringly, as he edged slowly backward, still regarding her with those adoring eyes. And Ramona, somehow, could not help casting upon him a regretful glance; there was such a charm, such attraction in his face and manner.

As they drove homeward, the episode was discussed freely. First the remarkable re-

semblance and then the winning sweetness of the little Alejandro.

"It is history repeating itself," said Mattie Gordon. "There is an Alessandro in 'Ramona' also."

"Say rather fiction repeating itself, to a certain extent," said her mother, "though I can not see many points of resemblance."

"How did that Indian boy come to have your fine old Spanish name, do you think, Ramona?" asked Ellen.

"Oh! there are many like that," was the indifferent reply. "In early days the old Spanish captains had Indian wives. You will find all our Spanish names among them."

"But you look so much alike. Would it vex you to find that you are far-away cousins?"

"Vex me? No; it could not hurt in any way. It is likely that four or five generations back we *are* cousins."

"How amused your grandmother will be when we tell her," said Mattie.

"Oh no!" cried Ramona, in sudden alarm. "Let us not tell her. Sometimes grandmamma is strange. She is very proud, and what I should not mind would perhaps vex her. I can never tell. It will be better, I think, not to say anything to grandmamma."

And so it happened that in the evening, at the merry-making, while they gave the Señora a graphic account of the day's doings, there was not a word said of Alejandro Almirante.

CHAPTER VI.

A DISCOVERY.

RAMONA had been so occupied with her friends after her return from the Mission that she did not have any opportunity to tell Concilio that she had seen her relative—Refugio. But after they had all gone, and the grandmother had retired, the old Indian woman came to her room with a pitcher of fresh water, which she had forgotten to bring during the day.

Ramona was brushing her hair, preparatory to going to bed. Turning from the mirror, she said:

"Ah! Concilio, I had almost forgotten to tell you that I saw a little boy at the Mission who says he is your cousin. He has been here, but I did not remember him."

"Yes," replied the old woman. "He is in some way a cousin to me. Once he came

here with my brother. Is the boy well, and doing well?"

"Oh, yes; he seems a very nice boy. But there was one there—a darling child—about eleven, and small for that, but so pretty, and so gentle, and with such a voice. Oh, it is a wonder."

"Ah! that is good," replied Concilio, indifferently, as she turned to leave the room.

"And there is something strange about it. He—the nice little fellow—looks like me. They all said so, and it may be so, for his name is also Almirante."

Concilio's face betrayed neither interest nor surprise, but she seated herself on the broad window-ledge.

"Well," she said, "that may be; we are all of us named from the Spanish. I have heard my father say that when the Fathers baptized the Indians they gave them names, and it is well known that many of the soldiers took Indian wives."

"Yes, I have heard that," replied Ramona, laughingly. "And I said to Ellen and Mattie that maybe we were far-away cousins."

"I do not think you are," said Concilio, drily, "and please do not speak of it to the Señora; it would displease her."

"Oh, I shall not; be sure of it," replied Ramona. "But you come from San Vincente yourself, Concilio. Perhaps you know the parents of the boy. His father is dead, but his mother is alive, and a very good woman, the Sisters say. Her father is called Pago, and he is the head man at San Vincente."

"Yes, I know them—I know them," replied Concilio. "How old is the boy, Señorita?"

"About eleven, I said. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, yes; so you did. And he is a pretty boy?"

"Oh, *so* pretty, so pretty, Concilio. He

looked at me, and smiled, and the Mother called him to us. I can not forget him; he was so sweet, Concilio; he was different from the others. It is a pity he must be as they."

"How as they?"

"There at the reservation all his life, digging or working in the mines, perhaps, at Molino. He holds his head so proudly and his eyes are so clear and open. He is different from the others."

"So does his mother think that he is different," said Concilio, "but she can do nothing."

"She has spoken of him to you?"

"Oh, yes, four years ago, when I was at San Vincente. He was then reading already in Spanish."

"Who taught him?"

"His mother."

"Do the old Indians read—there—on the reservation?"

"She is not an old Indian, Señorita. She is no more than thirty-two years old."

"Why does she live there?"

"It is her home. She has no other. It is right she should live with her father. But for her child she would like something more. But it is late, Señorita; the Señora will hear us talking, and she will be displeased."

"Yes, it is late, Concilio. Good-night."

"Good-night, Señorita, and may God keep you."

The old woman went out, closing the door softly behind her, and Ramona retired to rest. But she was not sleepy. The night was close, and after a while she thought she would like a drink from the *olla,* which hung in a shady corner near the dining-room. Throwing on her dressing-gown, and putting her feet into a pair of scarlet wool slippers, she opened her door, walked lightly across the piazza, and, dipping the gourd in the jar, took a long, refreshing draught. To her surprise, the door of the *sala* stood open. She advanced to close it, and so caught a glimpse of the rising moon, now almost full, as it came

slowly into view above the other side of the house. A comfortable leather-covered chair stood invitingly just inside the door. Ramona paused.

"I will just sit here a few moments," she thought, "and watch the moon rise." Quickly and noiselessly she glided into the room. All was still as death. From where she sat, a few feet from the open door, she could see the dim light of the taper always burning before the crucifix in her grandmother's room, directly opposite, across the *patio*. Suddenly she heard footsteps approaching. Her heart began to beat violently, but she was soon reassured—they were those of Concilio. A couple of steps at this point led down to the courtyard. Here the Indian woman seated herself. Again came the sound of footsteps, and Valeriano sat down beside his wife.

"When did you come in?" she inquired.

"But now," he replied. "Some of the men from San Vincente are down at More-

na's, drinking and playing cards. They are in for Corpus Christi."

"That is a fine way to celebrate it," said Concilio. "Are they drunk—any of them?"

"No, they are not," was the reply. "Juan Pago tells me that his father is very sick; they do not think the old man will live long."

"That will be bad for Maria," said Concilio.

"Why so? Can she not live still with Juan and Pedro?"

"Perhaps, for a while. But they will marry."

"And she also. Why not?"

"It may be, but I think not."

"And why? Augustino Machado will marry her any time. You know that."

"I do not think she will have him."

"And why?"

"Because of the boy."

"Now they are going to talk of little Alejandro," thought Ramona. "He must be the boy they mean."

But here a long silence ensued. At last Valeriano said:

"Why are you not in your bed, Concilio?"

"I do not feel to sleep. I have been disturbed a little to-night. There is something in the air, Valeriano."

"What do you mean?"

There was a moment of hesitation, and then Concilio, lowering her voice, leaned forward and touched her husband on the knee as she replied:

"The Señorita saw him to-day."

"Saw who?"

"The boy—Alejandro."

"Her—?"

"Sh, sh! Valeriano. Speak softly. Yes, she saw him—the little Alejandro."

"And where?" asked the old man, in awe-stricken tones.

"At the Mission."

"How do you know it, Concilio?"

"She told me to-night, not more than an hour ago."

"She told you? How should she know?"

"Know what, stupid man?"

"About him—the little fellow."

"She knows nothing. To-day she went with the neighbors to the procession. At the school she saw him, with the others. To-night she told me that there was at the Mission a little boy who looked like her, and she thought it strange that his name should be like hers—Almirante."

"And what did you say?"

"I said what every one knows—that in olden times many Spanish men took Indian wives. So have we all, or most of us, Spanish names."

"And she was satisfied?"

"To be sure; she suspects nothing."

"She may tell it to the Señora."

"I think not, but if she does it will not much matter. An angry hour for the Señora, but that is all. And the Señorita Ramona will go no more to the Mission."

"Something will come of it, Concilio."

said Valeriano, after a pause. "It is God who has ordained it. It has not happened for nothing that on the day of Corpus Christi our dear Señorita has seen for the first time her brother, who ought to share with her here the home and the love of the Señora."

"Did you not hear a sound?" whispered Concilio, inclining her head in the direction of the *sala.* "I thought something moved."

"Foolish woman, no," said her husband. "The chairs creak in the night. Like you and me, their bones are old. See, the door is open!"

"So it is," replied Concilio. "By some chance the Señora forgot to-night to lock it."

"I wonder if she sleeps soundly?" said Valeriano, glancing toward the room where the taper was burning.

"Perhaps not," said his wife. "But why should she not? The poor lady has had much to bear. Not like some would have done, she forgave Don Alejandro, and brought home his daughter."

"But why not the boy also?"

"That I can not say. I have heard that Maria would not give him up, and, again, Pia Moro has himself told me that the Señora said he was too dark, too much like an Indian."

"It is not for us to judge her, no," said the old man. "She has done very well, as you say. But in one way she is wrong. It were better that the Señorita should know now, while her grandmother is living. A day will come when some one, not so kind, will tell her what she alone of all her friends and neighbors does *not* know."

"That is true. But the poor Señora—she is so proud. And she can not do it; it would be too hard. But when she dies, the others—who are already jealous of our Señorita—they will tell her, and they will rend her heart, and then cast her forth."

"So it will be. But they can not cast her forth, Concilio, for all that the Señora has is hers. That I know, Concilio, and so do you.

When the will was made that time, so it was ordered."

"Yes, yes; but let us not talk of it any more. It is late; we should be in our beds. See, the moon is already high in the heavens. It must be eleven o'clock. Come, Valeriano."

"Yes, we might well have been in our beds two hours ago," said the old man, rising with some difficulty from the step where he had been sitting. "To-morrow we shall be stiff. We are not so young as we were, Concilio, not nearly so young as on that morning when Don Alejandro told the Señor that he would not and he could not marry the Señorita Marta Ocleoa, because he was already the husband of the daughter of Sebastiano Pago, the chief of the Diequinos. Nor even so young as that day, ten years ago, when the Señora brought home the Señorita Ramona from San Vincente. God and Our Lady forbid that we should ever see such times again, Concilio! God forbid it!"

"Hush! foolish man," said his wife in a

whisper. "You are speaking louder and louder every moment. Come, it is late—very late."

Passing the half-open door of the *sala,* she closed it tightly. Ramona crouched backward into the shadow, but it would have needed sharper eyes than those of the Indian woman to have discovered her in the depths of the dark, leather-covered chair.

Once more silence reigned in the *patio,* now flooded with moonlight. For a long time Ramona lay still as death in the darkness of the *sala,* unable to collect her thoughts, half stunned by the revelation she had unwittingly heard. At length it seemed to her that some one, not herself, was beating a strange tune on the top of her head to the words, "I too am an Indian; Alejandro is my brother." After this had been repeated many times, she feared that she must run away, or cry aloud. This fear roused her to a fuller consciousness of where she was, alone in the *sala,* with all the world asleep. Rising with an effort she set the door ajar. The

birds were twittering in the tree tops; already dawn was breaking in the eastern sky. And no child of the forest ever stepped with more noiseless tread than did Ramona as she stole along the *corredor* to her room, where, throwing herself upon her bed, she soon was wrapped in the heavy sleep of grief and exhaustion.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DAY AFTER.

"RAMONA, Ramona!" called the Señora next morning at her window, but there was no reply. She opened the door and called again more gently, for Ramona was asleep. This was something unusual; generally the sound of her grandmother moving about in the next room awakened her, but this morning she had slept through an extraordinary amount of noise. The turkeys had broken loose from the barnyard, and a swarm of them had run through the kitchen into the *patio,* where Valeriano chased them about for some time, until they were induced to retrace their wandering steps.

The Señora went over to the bed. Ramona lay stretched across it in her dressing-gown, her feet still in the scarlet bedroom slippers she had put on the night before.

"She must have been ill, poor child," thought her grandmother. "The ride and the excitement, with the merry-making last night, was too much for her." Stepping softly to her own room, which was adjoining, she took an eider-down quilt from the lounge at the foot of the bed and threw it over the sleeping girl.

It was about two hours after this that Ramona awoke, suddenly but completely, with a sense of something dreadful weighing on her brain and heart. She sat up in bed, pressing her fingers against her temples. Then she realized what had happened, and lay back once more upon her pillow, for her head ached badly. A feeling that a cruel wrong had been committed overwhelmed her; for the first time in her life she felt a sense of injury against her grandmother. Something had been concealed from her that she ought to have known. She had a mother and a brother; and but for what had occurred the night before, she would probably never have

learned it. "Ah! yes," as Valeriano had said to his wife as they sat conversing on the steps of the *corredor,* "some one would have told her, but not in a kind and merciful way." The sense of injury redoubled. If her grandmother had really loved her she would not have thus kept her in ignorance. And her brother, her dear little brother, what would become of him? He had not had his due. Why had she been chosen and the boy left? No, her grandmother had not been kind. And now she could understand many things which had formerly been mysterious—the life of seclusion they had led, the indifference of her distant aunts and cousins toward her, the irritation of her grandmother whenever she had playfully alluded to her dark complexion; her strange and sudden anger at the episode of the book. Thought followed thought in quick succession; her heart was torn, her whole soul in rebellion. And then, a sudden mechanical movement of which she was hardly conscious reversed the current of her

reflections, and stemmed the rushing torrent of her indignation. She stretched out her arms, and her hands touched the coverlet the Señora had thrown over her. She at once recognized the rich satin and soft feel of the quilt, and in an instant the hot, rebellious waves were surging backward, tears filled her eyes, and once more her heart was filled with love and gratitude for the care and affection which had surrounded her from her earliest years. "Dear grandmamma, poor grandmamma," she thought, "how can I judge her? How can I reproach her? For her it must have been hard, terribly hard. Oh! I must get up; I must dress myself, and I must never let her know." But suddenly she could see before her again the vision of a sweetly smiling, boyish face, and her untried and loving young heart went out with longing and devotion to the boy who now seemed almost a part of herself, although until yesterday she had not dreamed of his existence. Then she made an effort, and arose, dressing

herself slowly, with many pauses for sorrowful but aimless thought. At last she went to the mirror to comb her long black hair, which hung in a cloud about her face. For a moment she gazed at her own reflection in the glass, murmuring, under her breath: "Ah! yes; why did I not see it long ago? That is the face of an Indian." Then she turned hastily away, and plaited her hair quickly, looking in the glass no more. But Ramona was mistaken. Hers was not the face of an Indian. Save for the thick, straight hair of midnight blackness, and the olive tint of her skin—and even that was not unusual in Spanish girls—her features were those of her grandmother.

When the Señora came to the door again Ramona was saying her morning prayers, her head buried in her hands. The grandmother went back to the kitchen to tell Concilio to prepare some fresh coffee, and, returning, found Ramona about to step out to the piazza.

"But, *mi querida,*" cried the old lady in alarm, "what has come to you? Were you ill in the night? You are so pale and there are such rings under your eyes. I can not think. Why did you not remain in bed?"

"It was so late, so very late, when I slept, grandmamma," replied the girl, nestling close to the Señora's shoulder. "I did not feel well at first."

"So I thought. You were lying uncovered on your bed this morning. I am afraid you will have taken cold, *mi corazon.*"

Ramona said nothing. At the sight of her grandmother she could hardly refrain from crying. As they walked to the dining-room she was thinking: "Yes, she loves me, she does love me. And how can it be that she does, when she is so proud, when she thinks of Indians only as one might say of slaves?" And as she looked at the Señora, busily ministering to her needs, as she sat at the table, for one brief moment she almost felt as though she would never reveal to her kind

grandmother knowledge of the secret she had learned the night before. But she wanted to know all, all of the sad story—she was old enough, she was no longer a child, and yet she anticipated almost with terror the result upon her grandmother when approached upon a subject so distasteful. With these thoughts in her mind, it is no wonder that Ramona ate and spoke but little. When she had finished her breakfast the Señora made her lie in the hammock for the rest of the morning, while she busied herself with Adriana about the household affairs.

Just before dinner Ellen Gordon made her appearance.

"Good-morning, Señora," she said, "and Ramona. But why are you lying so lazily in the hammock?"

"She is not well," replied the grandmother. "She has a bad headache and slept late. Too much riding yesterday and dissipation, perhaps, last night."

"That is too bad. But it could not have

been the riding, Señora, for it is only eight miles in all. If anything, it was walking in the procession in the hot sunshine. Mattie has a touch of headache this morning, and mamma feels certain that was the cause of it."

"That is truly the cause," replied the Señora. "If they both keep still for the rest of the day they will be better to-morrow."

"I am disappointed," said Ellen. "Mamma suddenly remembered this morning that after having seen the beautiful drawn-work done by the Indian children at the Mission, she meant to have some handkerchiefs made for my aunt, whose birthday is in August. But in the hurry of leaving mamma forgot it, and as the school closes the last of June, she wishes to have them done as soon as possible. So we thought we would drive over to-day again, she and I, and we wanted Ramona to go with us."

The Señora shook her head, but Ramona seemed all at once to become full of animation. "Ah! let me go, grandmamma," she

pleaded. "The fresh air will do my head good, and there will be no walking to tire me."

"You wish to go, *querida?*" responded the Señora, somewhat surprised. "Well, if you think it will be of benefit to your headache you may accept the kind invitation of Mrs. Gordon and Ellen."

Ellen was delighted at the permission, and departed, promising to return shortly after dinner for Ramona, who got up at once, made her toilet for the drive, and but for the feverish red of her cheeks, and the unusual brightness of her eyes, seemed to have resumed her normal condition of health and happiness.

Her thoughts were now occupied with the prospect of once more seeing the little Alejandro, and being able to exchange a few words with him. Although she had no idea of communicating or even hinting to him the knowledge she had attained, she longed to see him again, and show him that she was interested in him. And yet she felt a qualm of con-

science when she thought that in some sense she was deceiving her grandmother, from whom she had never before had the slightest secret. She felt almost like a criminal as the Señora kissed her on both cheeks, when she was about to enter the carriage where Mrs. Gordon and Ellen were waiting.

The girls were all in the sewing-room when they arrived at the Indian School. Ramona looked at them with a new interest—there was something in common between them now which—for her at least—had not existed yesterday. But, try as she would, she could discover in none of them any resemblance to herself.

They were all short in stature, broad of feature, and of placid, stolid expression, though their eyes brightened when something interested or pleased them. Seemingly out of place among them all was one girl—tall and slender as Ramona herself, with light blue eyes and brown hair. Her skin was of a waxen pallor.

"She is not an Indian?" questioned Ramona of the teacher who presided over the sewing-room.

"Not a pure Indian," was the reply. "Her mother is a half-breed, her father a Jew."

"I do not like her skin," thought Ramona, "nor the shape of her face. I would rather be as I am than have a complexion as white as that."

The business for which Mrs. Gordon had come being finished, there was no longer any excuse for remaining.

Ramona was disappointed. But as Mrs. Gordon took the reins in her hand, she said: "Girls, would you like to come for a little while to the olive grove? It is so pleasant there among the trees."

Ramona hastened to reply that she thought it would be very pleasant, and Ellen agreed with her. Ramona glanced toward the boys' department, but there were none of them in evidence.

"Our boys have gone for a walk this after-

noon," said the Mother, who had accompanied them to the carriage. "Always after an occasion like yesterday they are restless. With the girls it is different. They are tired, and are glad to sew. Ah! here they come now across the field below the orchard."

Hope sprang anew in Ramona's heart. It was probable, she thought, that they would come back through the grove, as it was the most direct way to the house. And so it proved. The party were not long seated on the round bench which encircled the largest tree when the boys came trooping along, in twos and threes, joyous and barefooted, chattering in Spanish at the top of their voices. And, yes—in the very front of the first group, led by the teacher, was Alejandro—*her brother Alejandro.* She could scarcely control herself, her excitement was so great.

"There is the little boy who looks like you, Ramona," said Ellen. "He sees you; he is smiling."

Ramona rose to her feet; the boy came for-

ward; it was as though they both had the same thought at the same instant. As they did so a monkey in the arms of one of the larger boys attracted the attention of the Gordons, as it did that of the other groups, and in a moment they two were alone, standing together—looking into each other's faces.

The girl seized both his hands. "I have found out something," she said, excitedly. "We are relations. Tito, we are relations."

The boy looked down. She felt his hand tremble. Then his eyes sought hers again.

"I knew it," he said in a low voice.

"You knew it!" she exclaimed. "Since when?"

"Always, I have known it," he replied.

"That we are—"

"That you are my sister. No, not that, but that the Señora Almirante is my grandmother."

"And yesterday?"

"Refugio said to me: 'Look, that is the Señorita Almirante.'"

Ramona still had his hand. They were both trembling. "And I—" she said slowly, "I only knew it last night."

The child did not know what to say. Ramona longed to be alone with him in some quiet spot where they could converse unobserved. But she realized that for the present, at least, that would be impossible. It was something, after all, to have had these few words.

"Ramona, Ramona," called Mrs. Gordon. "It is time to be going; the sun is getting low."

"*Adios, querido,*" said the girl, drawing her hand from that of her brother, with a reluctant clasp.

"*Adios*—Señorita," he said, and walked slowly toward his companions, while Ramona rejoined the Gordons.

"Is your head better, dear?" inquired Mrs. Gordon, after they had gone a short distance.

"Yes, I think it is quite well," said Ramona. "It has done me good to come out."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SENORA GOES ON A JOURNEY.

RAMONA found her grandmother in great concern over a letter which she had received during the afternoon. Her eldest daughter, the Señora Baistero, had long been afflicted with an incurable disease, and the doctors had recently told her that she had but a few weeks to live. She was very desirous of seeing her mother before her death, and her husband had written an urgent letter to the Señora, begging her to come at once. They lived in San Francisco, nearly eight hundred miles distant; the Señora had never been a traveler, and dreaded the journey. At the same time she was extremely anxious to see her daughter once more, from whom she had been separated for many years. But the way had been partially smoothed for her; the distance to Los Angeles was but slight, com-

paratively, and there she would be met by her son-in-law's brother, who would accompany her the rest of the way to San Francisco. A difficulty about Ramona now presented itself. The Señora would not for a moment entertain the idea of leaving her alone with the servants; such is not according to Spanish ideas or custom. And the Señora Almirante held almost as tenaciously to old forms as did her ancestors of a hundred years before. She could see but one solution to her difficulty; that of sending her to the convent for the time she should be gone. The prospect was not disagreeable to Ramona, except for the fact that, for the time being, it would separate her entirely from her brother, whom she had hoped to see again before the summer vacation. The brief interview she had had with him but served to increase her longing to talk with him, to ask him questions, and see what new light he might be able to throw on the subject which now filled all her thoughts. But when Mrs. Gordon came over

in the evening she at once suggested that Ramona be allowed to remain with them until her grandmother's return.

At first the Señora demurred at this, but finally consented, her decision being weighted by Ramona's preference, which was to visit her friends. She knew very little of her relatives; her grandmother had always been reticent concerning them, and from time to time she had fancied that this reticence was in some way connected with herself. Now she was sure of it, and recalled many things to strengthen her conviction. Whenever she had reflected on the subject, which, to tell the truth, was not often, for she had a cheerful and contented spirit, and yearned for no horizon beyond her grandmother's home, she had come to the conclusion that her mother had not been pleasing to the family. There were times when she had longed to ask something concerning her, but as the Señora had never mentioned her, she had never been able to summon the courage to do so. All was plain

to her now, and while there were moments when she felt a bitterness of soul, her judgment was clear and fair enough to understand how the mother whom until recently she had supposed dead, could not have been anything but most unwelcome to the family of the proud Almirantes.

But Ramona was very unselfish, and while her grandmother was making her preparations for departure, she resolutely put her newly found trouble behind her, forced herself to be as cheerful as of old, and gave the Señora every assistance in her power. Twenty-four hours after the reception of her son-in-law's letter the Señora was on her way. The evening before her departure she said:

"Be assured, *querida,* that I shall not remain away any longer than I can help. I have longed for years to see your poor Aunt Teresa, and many times she has thought of coming, but her family is large, and she found it impossible to leave. And now I shall only have a few days with her, perhaps

—a very few days. So it is—so it is in this sad world. But instead of complaining I should thank the good God who is permitting me to be with her in her last hours. For her husband I do not much care. He is a great deal older—nearly as old as myself. But your grandfather thought it would be a good marriage for Teresa, who was always gentle and obedient, and made no objection. And in some ways it *was* a good marriage. She has enough of the world's goods."

"Have you never seen her since she was married, grandmamma?" asked Ramona.

"Never," was the reply. For a moment the Señora was overcome by emotion, but presently she wiped away the falling tears and continued:

"I had always hoped that when I should die, *querida,* she would have been your friend. And she would have been if it were possible. But there are difficulties when one is married. You would have loved her, Ramona, and her heart would have clung to you, for your

father was her idol. She the oldest, and he the youngest—she was sixteen when he was born."

After a brief silence the Señora continued:

"With your Aunt Ortega—Francisca—it is not the same. Of all my children she was the hardest to control, and to understand. There is not much affection there, *querida.* You will see that when you think that in ten years she has not visited her mother, though I am only one hundred and twenty miles from her home. Never have I seen any of her children. But I shall sleep at her house to-morrow night. God grant that to her care you may never be left."

"Did she not love—my father?" asked the girl, looking timidly into her grandmother's face.

"She loves no one but herself, Francisca. But perhaps that is too harsh—no doubt she loves her children; what mother does not?"

"Grandmamma, you will live many years still," said Ramona. "I shall not be left

alone until I am able to care for myself. I am almost that now."

"Poor child, poor child," said the Señora. "It is now that you are at the most critical time. But all is fixed for you if I should die, as Father Gaspara knows. And I will say it —not to alarm you, but that you may know that which is right you should know."

Ramona trembled; she thought that her grandmother was about to make the disclosure she had so long withheld. But she was mistaken. The Señora drew the dark head to her shoulder as she continued:

"Remember this: All that I have is yours —yours alone. My husband gave to all their portions, and to me mine, to dispose of as I should choose.

"For this he had a reason—he knew well who would most need it, who would be the most helpless. All the rest are well provided for—some better than others, but all have had their share. Whatever is mine now shall be yours, entirely yours, when I am gone.

And it is not alone that I say it—I have arranged and settled it all."

At that moment Ramona's heart was full, almost bursting. She longed to speak of what was weighing on it so heavily, but her unselfishness withheld her. At the same time she resolved to keep her secret from her grandmother no longer than she would find it necessary after her return. Otherwise it would be a shadow between them, and that she could not have endured. At this time the Señora had enough to trouble and grieve her without adding to the burden. As to her mother, she had as yet scarcely formed a definite thought. But with all her might and all her strength she would plead for the little Alejandro on the Señora's return. She was so kind, so generous, so just; surely she could be persuaded to do something for him. If she only could see him, it would be enough to enthrone him in her heart for evermore. Oh, how she longed for the weeks to fly—that her grandmother might return and the story

be told. And then, with a sharp pang of self-reproach, she realized that her own affairs were not those of the greatest present importance, and devoted herself to preparations for the Señora's comfort with redoubled zeal.

At last she was gone, conveyed to the station in the Gordons' carriage, in which Ramona was to return with them to their house. As the quick-speeding train disappeared from sight, leaving only a long line of smoke to indicate that a few moments previous it had swallowed up and borne away all that had made life sweet and pleasant to her until now, she felt how bitter must be the dreadful parting of death. But bravely wiping the tears that would come, try as she might to control them, she followed her friends to the carriage, and very soon they were saying pleasant things and making joyful plans for the period of her visit.

"We shall ride *every* day, Ramona," said Ellen. "Remember, every day. And in the

mornings there will be music and Spanish, and sometimes drawn-work; you will have plenty of time to teach me now. The days will fly, Ramona; you won't know it until your grandmother is home again, and *perhaps* your aunt may get better."

They were obliged to pass *Casa Almirante* on their way, and as they approached it, Ramona was surprised to see Concilio standing at the gate, holding a letter in her hand.

"What is it, Concilio?" she asked as the old woman came out to the carriage. "I do not know what is in it, Señorita," she replied, "but as there came with it a fine large basket of strawberries, and to wait till to-morrow or evening they might spoil, I thought best to watch till you were coming back from the train. And the Señora? Did everything go well?"

"Yes, Concilio; she is now some miles on her way," said Mrs. Gordon.

"God grant that she find the Señora Baistero better, and that she may soon return to

us. It will be very lonely here without the Señora, and the Señorita Ramona," responded the Indian woman.

Meanwhile Ramona was turning the letter over and over in her hand. It was the first she had ever received, and she could not imagine from whom it had come.

"There is no stamp on it, Concilio," she said. "You did not get it from the Post Office."

"Surely not," rejoined Concilio. "Did I not tell you that the shoemaker at the Mission, going into town for leather, left it here with the basket?"

"No, you said nothing of that," replied Ramona, who now began to have a suspicion of its authorship. She longed to satisfy herself of this, yet did not wish to open the letter in the presence of the others.

"It is probably from the Sisters to your grandmother," said Mrs. Gordon.

"No, it is addressed to me," replied Ramona, at the same time holding it up.

"Why don't you read it?" asked Ellen. Her mother gave her a glance of reproof. It was an unwritten law in that family that there should be no curiosity about the affairs of others.

"Where are the strawberries?" asked Ramona, evading the very natural question.

"Here they are, Señorita," said Concilio, leaning over the fence, and producing a good-sized basket, made of the fresh *tules* which grow very plentifully near the ruin.

"Oh, how pretty!" exclaimed Ellen.

"Yes, it is beautiful," said Ramona, placing it on the seat beside her. "But first, Concilio," she went on, lifting apart some of the small, tender ends of pepper boughs which covered the berries, "bring a bowl and I will put in some for you and the others."

"No, no, Señorita," said Concilio. "We do not want them." But Ramona insisted, and Concilio was obliged to fetch the bowl, which Ramona filled to the brim. As they drove away, she opened the letter, or rather

note, for it was nothing more. There was no reason apparent to her companions for the radiant smile and sparkling eye with which she handed it to Mrs. Gordon, but they did not know what Ramona knew, they had not the remotest suspicion of the secret, half joyful, half sorrowful, which she shared with the little writer of the note which Mrs. Gordon read aloud to her daughters. It ran as follows; the words were English, but the construction purely Spanish.

"MOST AMIABLE SENORITA:

"Will you condescend to accept a few ripe strawberries which I myself have raised in my own garden? We have privilege to grow and sell some fruits and vegetables which we do not need for our own use. It will give me great pleasure if you will eat and perhaps also ask of the Señora Almirante, your honored grandmother, to eat some of my berries, which the good Mother Ambrosine has given me permission to send to you by my friend Mr. Emil Hendsch, the shoemaker, who to-

day goes to town. Most Amiable Señorita, I kiss your hands.

"Your respectful servant,

"ALEJANDRO."

On the other side of the page were added these words: "I have made with my own hands the basket, which I beg the Señorita will not despise, as my mother has taught me to weave it, at my home at San Vincente. On the 25th of the month we will have our school closing, and I think my mother will come to get me."

"*Isn't* that sweet!" exclaimed Ellen. "Why, the child has fallen in love with you, Ramona."

Ramona smiled. "And I with him," she answered playfully. "I must thank him for the strawberries." When she was alone, she read the letter several times. To her it meant that the little Alejandro could not resist the desire to show his affection by sending her the simple gift, and she could not help admiring the discretion, wonderful in one so young,

which revealed to her alone the wish that he would like to see her again before his departure for the mountains. And the mention of his mother! Might it not be possible that he had written of her, hoping that perhaps a meeting could be arranged between them? With a feeling that was at once half yearning and half shrinking Ramona for the first time began to imagine what that mother was like. Surely she must have been attractive and lovable, or her father would not have married her. Thus perplexed and wondering, she lay awake far into the night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SENORA ORTEGA.

RAMONA had been at the Gordons' but a week, when Adriana, the house-servant, appeared one morning with a very long face, asking to see "the Señorita Ramona."

"The Señora Ortega is there," she announced, when Ramona made her appearance.

"Where? At home?" exclaimed Ramona, in surprise.

"Yes, Señorita," replied Adriana. "She has been already through the house, in every room, and in the linen closet, and has asked Concilio for the keys of the big chests, but she will not give."

"I must go home, then," said Ramona, ignoring the latter portion of Adriana's speech.

"Yes, Señorita," said Adriana. "The

Señora Ortega has sent word, and will you come with me at once?"

"We are reading Spanish, and it will be half an hour, perhaps. Can you wait?"

"I think not," said Adriana. "The Señora has been in a great hurry that I come back and help her with preserving the berries. I will have to gather them."

Ramona returned to her friends to announce her departure. It was better, she thought, to go at once, in order not to displease her aunt, who might perhaps think she was not anxious to see her. She looked forward to the meeting without any pleasurable anticipations. She felt that Tia Pancha* would not be her friend. The Gordons were as sorry to lose her as she was to leave them. And she had been quite cheerful there; new amusements and occupations taking her thoughts, in the daytime at least, from the one idea which was now uppermost in her mind. Absence from the scene of her

* Aunt Fanny.

discovery had also aided in diverting her. She was soon ready, and after taking an affectionate leave of the Gordons, prepared to return home, Adriana walking beside her carrying the valise which held her clothes.

"When did my aunt arrive?" she asked, after they had started.

"This morning—by the first train—about eight," was the reply. "We will have much preserving to do while she is here, she says, and Concilio has already sent over to Sepulvedas for their kettle."

"But why?" answered Ramona. "Does not Concilio know that my grandmother never borrows from them? For some reason which I do not know, she does not like them."

"But what to do, Señorita?" responded Adriana, with a very expressive outspreading of the hands. "The Señora Ortega has said that it must be, because at the hotel they would have the largest preserving kettle, and Valeriano had to go."

Ramona said no more, but it became more

and more clear to her that in Tia Pancha she would encounter a personage altogether different from her grandmother.

She was standing in the *patio* when they arrived, talking to a little Indian boy, who had a large basket in his hand. Her back was turned to Ramona, but it was of goodly proportions.

"Go, now," she was saying; "fill the basket with raspberries, and I will give you two bits for them." The boy nodded, without speaking, and scampered away. She turned, to meet Ramona, face to face. The girl was about to embrace her, but the Señora extended only a stiff hand.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, looking at her critically from head to foot. "You are well grown, and not bad looking, but for the complexion, which is dark. I said to my mother, when she brought you first, that it would be so, that you would be always dark, but she would not believe me. I hope you are a good girl."

"I hope so; I try to be, Señora," replied Ramona, meekly.

"She does not call me aunt; she knows her place," said the Señora Ortega to herself, still scanning every feature and line of the helpless girl who stood downcast before her. They went into the house; she followed Ramona to her room, where, looking around, she said:

"You have it very comfortable here. My mother has given you good care. But she was always of a soft heart."

"Is my grandmother well?" Ramona asked, timidly. "I have not had a letter yet since she went."

"She was well when she left us, and we had a telegram from San Francisco that they arrived safely, and that my sister Teresa was fast failing. It happened that my husband had business in San Diego, and I had a sudden thought to come down with him. As I came in the train I saw that the wild raspberries were abundant along the road, and so

said to myself, I will take some home with me. Come, now, hurry and put away your clothes, and I will give you something to do."

"Yes, Señora," answered Ramona, in a low voice, removing her hat and beginning to unfasten her gown. "I will put on my dark blue gingham and help you all I can."

"How fine you are dressed," remarked her aunt, surveying her, again with arms akimbo. "One would think you a young lady."

Fortunately the sarcasm was lost on Ramona, who did not understand the Señora's covert meaning.

"I shall not be a young lady for some time," she replied, innocently. "I am only just sixteen."

The Señora stood aghast. "This is indeed assurance," she thought. "Can it be possible that my mother has so thoroughly spoiled this girl that she thinks herself a *lady*? Very well; I shall undeceive her before I am here much longer. She needs to be humbled, and

humbled she will be, or my name is not Francisca Ortega."

At this moment Concilio appeared on the threshold. "Ah! Señorita Ramona," she exclaimed, laying some stress on the words, "welcome home. You are looking well."

"Here, too, there is room for a taking down," thought the newcomer. "My mother is getting in her second childhood. Such respect as they pay to this girl! I am sorry I have stayed away from *Casa Almirante* all these years. I could have kept things in better order."

"Come quickly, both of you," she said sharply, turning toward the kitchen. Concilio followed her slowly, with lowering brows, Ramona making her appearance as soon as she was ready.

"Now, make haste; stem these berries," she said, "while I wash those already prepared, and weigh the sugar."

"But about the dinner, Señora?" asked Concilio.

"No matter; you can work till Adriana comes. You go faster than she. Sit there, Ramona; take the pan in your lap."

The work proceeded in silence; it was soon accomplished.

"Where is Adriana? Why does she not come?" exclaimed the Señora after a time.

"It is slow work, picking berries from the bushes, and she may not have found many on the roadside. It is, perhaps, that she has gone over to the fence near the Gordons', where there are many," said Concilio.

The Señora pulled a large basket from under the table. "Here, Ramona," she said, "take this and fill it, and send Adriana home with what she has."

Ramona's face flushed; she looked at Concilio. A week ago she would have indignantly protested at being sent on such an errand, but now! True it was that only to her grandmother was she a daughter of the house; the others doubtless regarded her as

did this cruel woman who had just given an insolent command.

But Concilio did not hesitate.

"Señora," she exclaimed, "you will not send the Señorita to gather berries on the public highroad?"

"And why not?" angrily answered the Señora.

"The Señora need not ask it," replied the Indian woman. "I wish not to have words with the Señora."

"And you dare not!" cried the angry woman. "To what pass have we come when this girl is like an equal in the household."

Ramona stood up. Concilio thought she was going to take the basket, as her aunt had told her to do, and was much surprised at the calmness with which she had received her insulting words.

"Señorita," cried the Indian woman, springing to her feet, "you shall not do it. *I* will take the basket, and fetch the berries. You shall not do it."

"I had no thought of doing it, Concilio," replied the girl, calmly "I am going back to my friends, the Gordons, where my grandmother bade me remain during her absence, and whom I never should have left without her command. Señora Ortega, I bid you good-morning."

"Now, this is too much," cried the irate woman, springing between Ramona and the door. "Girl! Do you know who you are?"

"I am the granddaughter of the Señora Almirante," was the reply. "My father was her son, and your brother."

"And your mother! Did you ever see her?"

"Never," replied Ramona. "Nor my father. At least, I do not remember them."

"I will tell you something, then," began the Señora Ortega, "since it appears that you have not heard it. Otherwise you would have been more humble than you are."

"Go, Señorita," cried Concilio. "Go at once, I beg of you. For the sake of the

Señora Almirante, do not hear, do not listen. It is hers to reveal or withhold, as she will."

The Señora Ortega uttered a hysterical shriek, and fell back against the table. Concilio pushed Ramona gently outward, and quickly closed the door. The girl went slowly along the *corredor* till she reached her own room. Turning the lock, she closed the blinds, and lay down on the bed, where she wept bitterly for some time. Then she fell asleep, and was aroused by the voice of Concilio at her door.

"Open, Señorita," she begged, in a soft, imploring tone. "The Señora has gone to visit the new shrine at the Mission, with the Señora Sepulveda. Open, I wish to say a word to you."

Ramona arose at once, unfastened the blinds and opened the door. "I must have slept long," she said. "The sun has all gone from the south porch."

"Yes, it is four o'clock," said Concilio, taking her by the hand, and leading her to the

lounge, where she drew her down beside her. It was the first time since her childhood that she had been so familiar, and Ramona's heart swelled with kindness and gratitude toward the old woman, who had so fearlessly stood between her and the persecution of the morning.

"Let us think a little," said Concilio. "Will it not be perhaps a mistake to go to the Señora Gordon's, now that your aunt is here? Would not the grandmother be displeased perhaps if we show to strangers that we can not have peace in our own household?"

"You are right, Concilio," answered Ramona. "I have so decided, while lying on my bed. I will not go back to Mrs. Gordon; while she is here I can only be quiet, and not mind if she quarrels. But why, why did she come, Concilio? She must have had a reason for coming here at this time."

"Far be it from me to speak ill of the daughter of my mistress," said the faithful

Indian, stroking Ramona's hand. "But of old I know her—it was to find out what she could of the Señora's treasures stored away—and also for other reasons. But do not mind what she may say to you, Señorita—and as for that, I have told her what may keep her from letting loose her sharp tongue on you again. My heart is sore for you, dear child; my heart is sore."

"My good Concilio," said Ramona. "Do not fret about me; it is neither so strange nor so hard for me as you think. A little while ago I would not have understood—but now I do."

"What do you mean, Señorita?" asked Concilio in an astonished tone.

"Concilio," whispered Ramona. "Why should I conceal it? That night when you and Valeriano were on the steps of the piazza talking, I heard you. I was in the *sala,* and I could not help listening. It is as well, Concilio; sometime I must have known it."

"Ah! Señorita, what did you hear? Tell

me, what did you hear?" exclaimed Concilio, hastily.

"That my mother is an Indian, and that I have a brother at the Mission. And only that day I had seen him, Concilio; and I loved him, though I did not dream who he was. Oh, that my grandmother might see him also! She could not help but love him; he is so dear and so pretty. And then she would do something for him, I am sure she would, Concilio, did she but see him once, only once. No one could resist him."

Concilio did not know how to reply.

"What can I say to you, Señorita?" she answered at last. "What can I say? To tell the Señora when she comes back; that will be best. For years and years she has kept it from you, and now that you have learned it through the long tongues of Valeriano and myself, it can not be helped, of course."

"It was not your fault, or Valeriano's," said Ramona. "If I had not been in the *sala* I would not have known. And what

more natural than that you should talk together in the evening."

"Let us pray God, Señorita, to keep the peace with your aunt, and that He will show you the best thing to do. For myself I think it is not well to hide anything from the Señora Almirante."

"Concilio, you could tell me many things that I would like to know," said Ramona, "but it would not be right, nor pleasing to my grandmother, that I should ask you. My Aunt Ortega can not hurt me; I will not take any notice of anything she does."

"That is well said," replied the old woman. "And it is the only thing to do. Wash your face, Señorita, and bathe your eyes with some cologne water. They are very red. And I beg that you will put on a very nice white dress this evening, and braid your hair smoothly with the red ribbons, that the Señora Ortega may see how much more beautiful is our Señorita than her own daughters. I have heard that they are all both stout of

form and homely of feature." With this parting shaft Concilio took her departure. She met the Señora entering the *patio* from the outside gate.

"Where is our fine lady?" she inquired. "Has she yet risen from her siesta?"

"The Señorita Ramona is making her toilet for supper," answered Concilio, respectfully, as she betook herself to her own department.

CHAPTER X.

RAMONA'S FLIGHT.

THE Señora Ortega was not interested in Indian children. Consequently, neither she nor her friend, the Señora Sepulveda, had asked to see the school, and thus the little Alejandro had escaped her eyes, which would not have regarded him with any feeling save that of detestation. Ramona had feared that she might meet him, and was much relieved when she and her aunt met at supper, and no allusion was made to him. That lady had apparently reconsidered her attitude of the morning, and was quite gracious to her niece during the next three or four days. The Gordons came to call on her, and thinking them to be people of importance, she received them graciously, inviting them to come again. On the seventh day of her stay word came

that her sister had died, and that the Señora would return home at the latter part of the week.

Her grief was not intense; her mind seemed to be concerned principally about the mourning, which she could not have made until her return to Los Angeles.

"But it is necessary to wear black of some kind," she said. "Anything will do; a skirt of my mother's you can shorten for me, Ramona, and for the waist, I can buy one ready made of black sateen down at the store in the village. Go find some black skirt of my mother's that is not too bad or too good. I do not want to spoil anything, of course."

A black skirt was found and altered by Adriana, somewhat to the displeasure of the Señora, who thought Ramona should have been able to do the work. She was sent to the village to fetch several waists, that the Señora might suit herself, for under the circumstances it was not possible that she could go out. Ramona went willingly; it was a relief

to her mind to get away from the tireless supervision of her aunt, if only for an hour. She began to believe that it would be impossible to see her brother again before the vacation should set in. It was now the 20th of June, and in five days he would be returning to the mountains. The child would think she had forgotten him, for she had not answered his note, having hoped to be able to go to the Mission from day to day. But the Señora had kept her busy doing embroidery, an accomplishment in which her own daughters did not excel.

Having selected the waists at the store, Ramona retraced her steps, and on reaching home she found her aunt in the Señora Almirante's room. A large closet in which she kept her clothing had been emptied of all its contents. Gowns, shawls and mantles were strewn on the bed and surrounding chairs; even the deep shelves had given up the dusty boxes which had lain hidden so long, and these had also been opened and ransacked.

"Do not bring the waists in here, Ramona," said her aunt. "The room is full of dust. I wonder when that closet was cleaned out before. I shall have Adriana wash it, now that it is empty. I will go into your room and try on the waists to see which fits me best." After she had succeeded in finding one large enough for her ample form, she bade Adriana wrap up the others and put them out of harm's way. "I will take them down when I go," she said. "Doria Sepulveda has been here to say that her mother will call at twelve to take me to the Cajon, where an old friend, Maria Antonia Moreno, is visiting her father and mother. If it were an ordinary case I would not, of course, go out of the house for a week, at least. But Maria Antonia, who married Juan Alverado, now lives in the City of Mexico, and is home for the first time in ten years. I think we will stay all night, perhaps, as it is far away. And, Ramona, I have been looking for a crape veil of my mother's; I know she has several put away. But I can

not find any—and it will be impossible for me to go without a crape veil."

"I have never seen any crape veil of my grandmother's," said Ramona, "excepting the one she wears to Mass, and sometimes when she goes out for a ride."

"But she has them—I know she has them," replied the Señora, impatiently. "If they are nowhere else, they must be in the large black mahogany chest, of which Concilio tells me you have the key, with the others. Fetch them, that I may open it, and see if there are not some veils folded up and put away among other things."

"It is true that I have the keys, Señora," replied Ramona. "My grandmother forgot them, and Concilio gave them to me the evening you came. But she never allows any one to touch the mahogany chest. I have never seen it opened. It is always when she is alone that she unlocks it. Sometimes she has brought things from it to air in the *patio,* but never have I seen inside of it, Señora."

"Well, well," exclaimed her aunt. "Neither is it intended that you shall see the inside of it to-day. It is I who will open it. Quick, give me the keys. Where are they? In your pocket?"

"Yes, Señora—in my pocket," said Ramona. "I am sorry, but I can not give you the keys. To no one but my grandmother will I give the key of the mahogany chest."

"What! you dare to refuse to allow me to examine the chest of my own mother!" shrieked the Señora Ortega. "Give me the keys this moment. I command you."

"Señora, I can not," said Ramona. "My grandmother did not even leave the keys in my care. In the hurry she forgot them. When she is here they are always in her pocket during the day, and at night she sleeps with them under her pillow. Never would I dream of opening her chest, and I can not give you the key."

"And do you compare yourself to me?" cried her aunt. "It is insufferable to see you

going about this house as though it belonged to you; this house, where my sisters and I were born and spent our childhood and girlhood."

"And my father also," said Ramona, calmly.

"But not your mother," laughed the angry woman in a fury. "But not your mother. Never did she set her foot under this roof; seldom, indeed, under the roof of any civilized person. Do you know who and what was your mother, Ramona?"

"She was the wife of my father, Señora, who was also your brother," replied Ramona.

"And the daughter of—"

"And the daughter of Sebastiano Pago, the chief of the Diequinos," answered Ramona with a calmness she did not feel. "I have heard, Señora, that he is an honorable man, respected by all who know him."

The Señora Ortega was surprised. From her friend, the Señora Sepulveda, she had gained the impression that Ramona was igno-

rant of the fact that her father had married an Indian. She had determined not to broach the subject any further than she had already hinted on the day of her arrival, but was at the same time fully resolved to impress upon her mother the necessity of doing so as soon as she returned. But her temper was a very uncertain quantity—and once roused it went very far. Now she was prepared to throw discretion to the winds. Shaking her finger in the face of the young girl who so calmly confronted her, she cried:

"Do you know what I would do with you, if I could? I would thrust you out in the road this moment, from whence no one would take you in till you wandered back, hungered and humbled, to the San Vincente reservation from whence you came; to the hut of your fine grandfather, Sebastiano Pago, where he sits, blind, weaving baskets, all day long, that he may sell them for food. Ah! there is where you should be, instead of here, in the house of my mother, eating her bread and

consuming the portion which should be for her children and grandchildren."

"I am also her grandchild, Señora," replied Ramona. "I have taken from her nothing that is yours."

"Ah! but when she is gone, but when she is gone! Then, daughter of perdition, then you shall see what will be done."

Ramona did not reply. She only thought of how best to withdraw. Her silence made the Señora more furious.

"Do you know, upstart, ingrate, why, for so many years, the children of my mother have not crossed her threshold?" she cried. "It is because they would not stand upon the floor with the one whom their mother had taken to her heart—the daughter of the Indian, of the servant who had laced their shoes and washed their feet, of the servant who had learned to pray and to read from the lips of the Señora Almirante. Ah, if it were possible, the bones of my father would rise in his grave and clothe themselves anew, and drive

you forth from this house, at the sight I have seen and the words I have heard this morning. *Ay de mi,* how shall I longer be able to exist under the same roof with this daughter of an animal, with this spawn of a slave?"

Ramona had grown very pale while the Señora Ortega was launching forth these cruel invectives, but the dark eyes that met those of the angry woman were neither insolent nor defiant. At the last words she turned slowly away; Concilio was making gestures from the *patio.*

"Give me the keys!" again cried her aunt. "Do you dare longer to refuse me the keys?"

"Señora, I will not," answered the girl.

"You will not? Then with an ax I shall break open the chest before your very eyes."

"That, Señora, you will not do," was the reply. "If you try, I shall call the women and Valeriano, and they will prevent you."

"The Señora Sepulveda is waiting," announced Adriana, and in an instant the angry woman, who had been about to fall into hys-

terics, was restored to her normal condition. She hastened to bathe her flushed face and make her toilet for the drive. In a few moments—minus a crape veil—she was on her way to El Cajon.

After she had gone Ramona went to the little oratory where she and her grandmother had spent many a prayerful hour, remaining there for some time. When she had finished her praying, she went to Concilio in the kitchen.

"Concilio," she said, "I can not be longer in the same house with the Señora Ortega. To her it is a disagreeable thing to have me here, and as for myself I can not bear it."

"I do not wonder, Señorita," replied Concilio. "I heard all, or nearly all, from the *patio*. The saints preserve us from a long visitation of the Señora Ortega, whose husband and family are to be pitied, as was the Señora, her mother, in days gone by. But it will all be past when the Señora Almirante returns, which must be soon. Try and be

patient, Señorita. Ask for the help of the good Lord."

"That I have already done, Concilio," replied Ramona, "and I feel that I must go."

"But where, unless to the Gordons'?" inquired the old woman. "And to go there is to say: 'I have an aunt at home, with whom it is impossible to live, even for a few days. Hence, I come to ask your hospitality.' What a shame would that not be, Señorita?"

"I have not thought of going to the Gordons'," said Ramona. "As you say, it would not be well."

"Where then, Señorita?"

"To the Mission. The Sisters would take me, I know, until my grandmother returns. There I would be safe, and she could not be displeased that I had gone there. Surely she would understand, Concilio."

"It is not a bad plan, Señorita, it is not a bad plan. But the Señora Ortega may object."

"I shall not tell her, Concilio. Right or

wrong, I shall not tell her. She will not be sorry that I am gone. And I shall see my brother again—and perhaps—my mother."

"*That* the Señora might not approve," said Concilio. "And if she should ask if I had known, what to say? I wash my hands of it, Señorita. Do not tell me any more."

"Oh, Concilio, do not be cross now," pleaded Ramona. "My heart is so sad, Concilio—do not be cross to me."

"No, no, Señorita, that I am not," replied the old woman. "But finish your business without telling me more."

"Very well," said Ramona. "So be it. I think of a way." So saying, she went into the garden where Valeriano was hoeing and ordered him to get the carriage to take her to the Mission. Wondering, the old man obeyed. Ramona made up a parcel of clothing, and after taking leave of Concilio, who wept as if she were going on a long journey, took her seat in the ancient vehicle, so seldom used that to see it passing the outskirts of the

village was sufficient to call all the neighbors from their houses. She stopped for a moment at the Gordons' to inform them that she was going to spend a few days at the Mission. They were not a curious family, and it never occurred to them to see anything strange in the proceeding. Once more she resumed her journey, and it was only as all that remained of the tiled roof of the old adobe structure came in sight that the courage and resolution which had upheld her so far began to fail.

CHAPTER XI.

A HAPPY ENDING.

THE sun was setting as the antiquated carriage drove slowly up the hill to the door of the Indian School. Supper was over; the children, boys and girls, playing in their respective yards. Ramona alighted from the vehicle, and bidding Valeriano wait until she came out again, she asked to see Mother Ambrosine. She was conducted to the parlor, where presently the Mother appeared.

"You will remember me, perhaps, Mother," said the visitor. "I was here on Corpus Christi for the procession. I am the Señorita Almirante."

"Ah! yes, I remember you very well," answered the good Sister. "And what can I do for you this evening? There is no one ill at home, I hope."

"No one, Mother," responded Ramona. "My grandmother is in San Francisco, where she went to be with my aunt, who died the day before yesterday. I have come, Mother—" Here she paused, not knowing how to proceed.

"What is it, my child?" asked Mother Ambrosine, encouragingly. "Do not hesitate to tell me what is troubling you. I shall be very glad to serve you in any way."

"I have come," continued Ramona, fortified by the kindly look in the eyes of the nun. "I am going to ask you to take me here, Mother, for a few days—until my grandmother returns."

"Sit down, my dear, sit down," said Mother Ambrosine, seeing her great agitation. Placing a chair close beside the one on which the young girl seated herself, she took her hand. "Now, tell me why you are leaving your home to come to us."

"Ah, Mother," she replied in a tremulous voice, "I can no longer remain at *Casa Almirante* while the Señora Ortega is there, and I

have nowhere to go but here. It would not be well to ask my friends to take me in; they would think it so strange."

"Who is the Señora Ortega, my dear? Were you left in her care?"

"No, Mother, I was not. She is the daughter of my grandmother. She came since she is gone. She will not allow that I call her aunt; she does not like me—because—because—"

"I understand," replied Mother Ambrosine. "I understand. She has not sent you away?"

"No, Mother; I came myself. But first I prayed very hard to know what to do, and it seemed to me that Our Lady said, 'Go to the Mission, Ramona; go to the Mission.' Concilio, who is our old cook, and who has been with her husband, Valeriano, in the family for fifty years—she knows that I am here. You will not send me away?"

"It is only on account of Father Gaspara, and he is not here," said Mother Ambrosine.

"He might not be pleased. And yet it really seems as if Our Lord was arranging things for you, as if it were the long delayed acceptable time. And how could I send you away? No, I can not."

"Thank you very much, Mother," said Ramona. "And now, if you please, I will go out and tell Valeriano that I am to stay."

"I will go with you," said Mother Ambrosine. "I know both Valeriano and Concilio."

They went to the carriage. After the old man had saluted her respectfully, Mother Ambrosine said: "Tell your wife that the Señorita Almirante will remain with us for the present, and that she need not be alarmed concerning her."

After he had gone, Mother Ambrosine conducted Ramona into the house, showed her to a small but exquisitely clean bedroom reserved for visitors, and bade her make herself at home. "And now," she continued, "it is best at the beginning to be quite open with you, as you will be, I am sure, with me. I have

not been long at the Mission; this is my first holy year. When you were here at Corpus Christi, Señorita, I did not know that you were the sister of Alejandro. Since that time I have learned it, and also that you were not aware of it until very recently."

"From whom did you hear it, Mother?" asked Ramona. "I would have told you at once. I did not mean to conceal anything from you."

"I heard it from Alejandro himself. When you see him, ask him to tell you how. He will explain it in his own charming little way. Shall I call him?"

"If you will be so good, Mother," said Ramona. "I have been longing to see him before he should return to the mountains. Only by accident did I learn the story which my grandmother has kept hidden all my life. To-morrow, Mother, when you have time, I will tell you all. I have been very unhappy since I came at Corpus Christi."

"Very well, my child. I will send Alejan-

dro," said Mother Ambrosine, as she took her departure.

The boy came at once. Flushed from playing ball, a little white straw hat, with a band of faded red ribbon, in his hand, he stood shyly in the open doorway. Ramona, who had been looking for him, was seated at the window. He had come by another way. For a moment he hung back, irresolute, hoping she would see him. But she still remained looking out of the window, and at length he said:

"Señorita, I am here—"

She turned quickly and clasped him in her arms.

"Ah! do not say Señorita any more," she cried. "Call me Ramona—sister. The Mother knows—soon everybody will know; it must be so—it *must,* my little Alejandro."

His lips were quivering. She sat down, drawing him close to her. "Sit here," she said, pulling forward a footstool.

"This is the visitor's room," he said, shyly.

"Are you to stay here all night—*mi hermana?*"*

She could scarcely hear the last two words, they were spoken so low.

"I am here till my grandmother returns," she said, and then, little by little, with a question here and there from her interested listener, she told him the whole story.

"And now tell me," she said, "how they came to know here that I was your sister, Alejandro."

The boy looked up at her and smiled. "Did Mother Ambrosine say anything?" he asked.

"Never mind; tell me," said Ramona.

"When you did not write anything about the strawberries," he began, "I thought maybe they did not give them to you. And so one day I wrote, and I wanted to see how it would look in writing to put *Mi querida hermana.*† And when I was writing it Mother came, and she said: 'What are you doing,

* My sister.

† My dear sister.

Tito?' And at first I did not want to show her, but she said I must, and then she said: 'But you have no sister, Tito.' And then I said, 'But, Mother, I have one." I had to tell her then, and she would not believe me. But Father Gaspara came then in the buggy from town, and she asked him."

"And what did he say, Tito?"

"I was afraid he would scold, but he looked at me, and he put his hand on my head, and he said to the Mother: 'Let him do, let him do; maybe it will be for good. This can not always go on so.'"

"And did you send the letter? I did not receive it."

"Yes," replied Tito, ruefully. "I gave it to Marco when he went to town with chickens, but he forgot it, and only this morning came to ask me if he should still put it in the Post Office. It was so dirty then, that I made him give it to me. I was going to write another, but again I thought no, that maybe the Señora Almirante would scold you."

Time passed swiftly for the brother and sister, until Ramona was summoned to take some refreshment. Then they separated for the night. The remaining days were filled with preparation for the school entertainment. Ramona had a long interview with Father Gaspara, who bade her be of good courage, and at length the last evening came, and many of the parents of the children, who had come from the mountains, were encamped about the *mesa* and in the valley, waiting to take them home on the morrow.

Twilight had already begun to fall. Ramona was coming slowly down the hill from the shrine of Our Lady, where every evening she was accustomed to take her hopes and fears. She had heard nothing from the Señora Ortega, and no further news from her grandmother, who should now be on her homeward way. Absorbed in thought, she looked neither to right nor left, when suddenly she heard her name called, and at a turn of the path found herself in the pres-

ence of Mother Ambrosine and Alejandro, who were accompanied by an Indian woman, plainly but neatly attired.

"*Esta es nuestra madre,*"* said Alejandro. The mother and daughter, thus confronted with each other, exchanged a long, lingering glance. Finally, at length, the mother extended her hand. "Señorita," she said, "it gives me joy to see you."

"*Mi madre,*" replied Ramona, with trembling lips. The eyes of the mother filled with tears.

"You are like the Señora," she said, "and like your father. So good you have been to my boy!"

Ramona did not reply; they were both ill at ease.

"Come," said Mother Ambrosine. "Let us go down."

They descended the hill. When they reached the house Mother Ambrosine opened the parlor door and left them together.

* This is our mother.

"Señorita," said the mother, "it is for the boy that I come this time. I have hoped that Father Gaspara would speak to the Señora Almirante for him. Do you think it will be of use?"

For a moment Ramona did not reply. She was trying to realize that the mother of whom of late she had dreamed with longing was in feeling and reality a stranger, and would always be one. It came to her all at once that she had no place in the life of the woman before her, that there could be nothing in common between them. With an effort she summoned her thoughts together.

"I hope so; that is what I long for," she replied.

"Señorita," said her mother, "it is not to blame the Señora Almirante. There is no need to explain; you can well understand. When your father married me I was so young. At first I lived with the Señora. He came to the mines; he was in charge there; he was sick at our house, and so it came about. First

the Justice of the Peace, for Father Gaspara would not. Then, when he saw that we had disobeyed him, he married us before the altar. So, between the mines at San Vincente and the *Rancho Almirante* he lived—your father. He was very good to me, Señorita. Then happened an accident; he was hurt at the mine. The Señora came; he died, and she took you to her home. Nearly eleven years it is, Señorita."

A dark head was thrust in the door.

"Come, Alejandro," said Ramona, and the boy entered. Almost at the same moment the door which separated the parlor from the chapel slowly began to move, and Father Gaspara made his appearance. Behind him, for she would not precede him, came the Señora Almirante. Ramona sprang forward. Her grandmother embraced her tenderly, murmuring sweet words of affection as she held her in her arms.

"*Querida,* you have suffered. I know all—all," she said at last.

"You are not displeased with me, grandmamma?" whispered the girl.

"Ah! no, *mi corazon;* ah! no," replied the old lady. "The Señora Ortega is gone; now you will come home. Not ever again will she visit us at *Casa Almirante.*"

Then it was that Ramona remembered, and, gently turning her grandmother toward the mother and son, she said:

"Grandmother, you know who these are? You will speak to them."

The Señora made no resistance. With the quick, graceful step which neither age nor sorrow had deprived of its buoyancy, she advanced to her who had once been the wife of her son.

"Maria Pago," she said, "I have been in there," pointing to the chapel, "for an hour I have been in there, talking to Our Lord. He has told me what to do. Ramona is the daughter of my heart; from henceforward the son of my Alejandro shall also be mine. What is past is past. Give him to me."

The woman fell on her knees. "With all my heart," she cried, "with all my soul. For years it has been my prayer."

"Rise, rise!" said the Señora, but Maria remained kneeling until a sign from Father Gaspara brought her to her feet. At the same time the priest took the boy by the hand and brought him to his grandmother. She stooped and kissed him. "God bless you, Alejandro Almirante," she said, and with the words of benediction took him to her heart forever.

Then she turned to the mother. "Maria," she said, "whatever my heart may wish, I shall not deprive you of some time seeing your son. By the death-bed of my daughter, Teresa, who so loved his father, I promised this and more. Twice a year you may come to *Casa Almirante* for a day."

But the Indian mother, with eyes downcast and hands clasped humbly before her, replied:

"Señora, when I give him to you, it is for-

ever. The life of Maria Pago has nothing to do with that of the grandchildren of the Señora Almirante. Once I caused you much pain; thus let me atone. After to-day I shall see him no more."

"Well done, bravely done, and for the best," said Father Gaspara.

"So it is, Maria," said the Señora. "But to help you I shall always be glad."

"I thank you," said the Indian woman, with a quick lifting of the head which became her well. "But I have brothers, and in August I am to marry Augustino Machado, who has wanted me for many years. But to give an Indian father to the son of Alejandro Almirante I would never have done. That is all, Señora. I will go."

Ramona was sobbing; the boy had hidden his face on her arm. The mother turned toward them, and stooping, kissed her daughter's hand. Then she lifted the child's head, kissed him on the forehead, on the cheeks and on the lips, and with a silent inclination

of the head to the priest and the Señora went slowly from the room. Pausing through the doorway, she gave one backward glance at the boy whom she was to see no more. There were tears upon his cheeks, but in the adoring gaze he lifted to the face of Ramona his mother knew that her place would soon be filled, and that already Ramona, his sister, was first in his heart.

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